

Editorial

Building Gospel Churches

'Always winter and never Christmas', that famous line from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* could be a very fair description of Scotland today. The march of ruthless secularism, political correctness and church decline apparently continues unabated. Often there is a blanket of complacency and apathy which refuses to recognise the crisis of the institutional church. This editorial is an appeal for us to engage vigorously in the building of Gospel churches. But what are Gospel churches? Five points can be made.

1. Gospel churches owe their existence to the living Word of God

Peter, in his first letter, says 'You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God' (1:23). A Gospel church is not named on a roll but a group of disciples who have responded to the call of Christ, whose lives have been changed and who meet with others who have experienced that same salvation. That means a Gospel church is not a club but a family, not an association of 'members' but a living organism.

This has certain implications. It will mean a concern for growth, not just in numbers but in maturity, and that

growth will be by what Peter calls 'pure spiritual milk' (2:2). The Word of God will be loved, honoured and obeyed and the church will be far more concerned about that than about programmes and activities. There will be concern that everyone is helped to grow in their Christian life and that people will develop regular and disciplined habits of Bible reading.

2. Gospel churches are sustained by the Word of God

In most churches the Bible is opened and read and a sermon preached which may, or may not, have some connection with the reading. That in itself does not prove that the church is a Gospel church. Only where the preaching is systematic exposition of the Word with pointed application is the Gospel unleashed to do its work in hearts and lives. My feeling is that we have lost this vision in much of evangelicalism today.

Sixty years ago William Still began his enormously significant ministry in Gilcomston South in Aberdeen which not only transformed that church but the thinking and practice of several generations of preachers. We are now in serious danger of squandering that legacy. I do not mean that we can or should reproduce the conditions of the

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period immediately following World War II. These were days, not only of thankfulness that a devastating war was over but of fairly large numbers attending church. While the Bible was not known by many in any detail, many of its stories would be, and there was a general familiarity with the life and teaching of Jesus among most churchgoers. In that situation, William Still, James Philip and others introduced a new emphasis on systematic, continuous exposition of Scripture as the way which would provide the dynamic for the reformation and renewal of the church and the conversion of the world.

That vision needs to be recovered. What is often forgotten now is that in their day these men were radicals. They were totally loyal to Scripture, convinced that every part of it was preachable and all of it needed, but they were not constrained by establishment or tradition. From those kind of ministries there was a steady flow of candidates not only for the ministry but people living for Christ in every walk of life and a multitude of occupations. But it was expository preaching, where in the power of the Spirit Christ was proclaimed, which did this. It still does. In my time in Durham not only did many young people go into various kinds of Word ministry but many others went to help in orphanages in India, to dig wells in Uganda, to live and work among street children. The preaching of the Word of God was the inspiration for all that and much else.

We must not confuse getting alongside people with Word ministry. Of course we need to relate to people, meet and talk and socialise with them. Different groups will be contacted in different ways and different activities will be planned. But if we build the bridges we must cross them. We must use our links with people to present Christ and the truth of the Gospel and not simply be content with showing friendship.

We need to work hard at our preaching and teaching. The Bible is life-giving and life-changing and we need to

unleash it. If we are ministers we need to make this our priority; if we are elders we need to release our ministers to give themselves to this vital work.

3. Gospel churches order their lives by the Word

If we want to see how serious a church is about the Gospel it is not enough to visit the main services of worship or the prayer meeting; we need to see what happens at their business meetings. Let us take as read that there has to be responsible financial stewardship and careful and wise management of buildings and other assets. But the real question is are we still driven by Gospel priorities? (This also applies to other Christian organisations such as Rutherford House.) The kind of question we always need to be asking is if our agenda is driven by the priorities of building the church and reaching the world. The Word preached must become the Word lived in the way we conduct our business.

It is amazing how often this is forgotten. We rightly say that the sermon must have relevance to daily living but this is seldom evident in our business meetings. So often instead of vision for the Gospel there is a niggardly and faithless mindset. So often instead of courteous discussion there is rudeness and unpleasantness. So often the priorities are those of the market place rather than the Gospel. Christ must be Lord in all of the Church's life and activities.

4. Gospel churches support each other

That may sound trite and obvious but in the contemporary scene it needs to be emphasised. Evangelicals in the Church of Scotland, for example, have a stronger voice in the Establishment, which is good in itself but brings with it the temptation to be seen as Church of Scotland first and evangelical second. Then the emphasis falls on propping up institutions rather than on building Gospel churches. This is not a call to leave our

churches but to look radically at where we are placing resources and energy.

Those committed not only to the Word of God but to its energetic preaching and living by its imperatives and shaping our churches by it need increasingly to stand together and, indeed, to coin a phrase, to move forward together. This can be done in a number of areas. We need to meet together with like-minded people as often as possible. May I urge the significance of the Scottish Ministry Assembly in this connection? Part of the reason for this Assembly is to have fellowship with other evangelicals and share insights and give mutual support. If you haven't already registered for this please do so now; we would love you to be there.

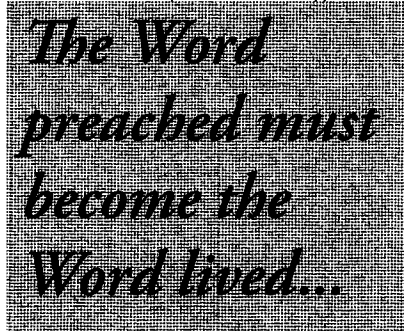
*The Bible is
life-giving and
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This relates to resources. Some of you may think that since I am not currently a minister of a church that I am talking about things I don't understand. But I do have relevant experience. For ten years I was a minister of a United Reformed Church in Durham, and that church nationally is liberal and hostile to evangelicalism. However, we were able to establish a biblical ministry with many hundreds of students attending regularly. Because of the generosity of St Helen's Bishopsgate in London we were able to establish a separate fund for the employing of student workers. Over the years I was able to work with a succession of gifted young men and women who not only evangelised and disciplined the student body but were involved in the church in a multitude of other ways. Incidentally, this provided a valuable team-setting

which, among other things, enabled women to develop their gifts within that context. We also had the support of Jesmond Anglican Church in Newcastle. That is an example of how Gospel churches of different denominations can work together without leaving their own structures. That kind of thing needs to happen here in Scotland.

5. Gospel churches must be involved in training

We are now reaping the consequences in the Church of Scotland of handing over the training of our ministerial candidates to the universities. I was trained that way myself and indeed carried on with further study. I spent over thirteen years teaching in an



Anglican Theological College which was an integral part of Durham University and whose degrees and diplomas were validated by that institution. Rutherford House has as part of its remit the scholarly study and teaching of theology exemplified in the Dogmatics Conference. I am no enemy of academia and indeed deplore the lack of real theological interest and learning of so much of the Scottish church.

But part of the reason I benefited so much from my experience in New College was that in my final year I was able to specialise in Hebrew and Old Testament. Much of what I learned then proves more and more valuable as the years pass, not because the teaching was evangelical – it wasn't – but because of the daily necessity of wrestling with the text and engaging with its meaning. The trouble is that it is possible to go through Divinity Schools with minimal engagement

with Scripture, and, indeed in the final year to do no biblical modules at all.

But where, in all this, can people learn to handle God's Word so that they can teach it to others? I mean not only ministers, but youth leaders, Bible Class leaders, student workers and the like. Churches need to facilitate and support training and draw on the resources of those who teach and train. In Rutherford House my great passion is to teach people how to read the Bible and communicate it to others; the classes we run and my writing are contributions to that. Highland Theological College, Dingwall, and the International Christian College, Glasgow, are bodies with which I am closely involved and I look forward to sharing in teaching their M.Th. in preaching (see details elsewhere in the Journal). Scottish Cornhill begins in September and I shall be involved in helping with the teaching and training (see interview with Edward Lobb elsewhere in the Journal). This, incidentally, is another example of those involved in Gospel ministry working together.

Also, churches need to be proactive in encouraging people into ministry. We need to identify those who have gifts and encourage them into attending training sessions either on a part-time or full-time basis. This is not simply about full-time ministers, vital as these are – but about helping people to work with youth, children and students. People working with teenagers need to know about youth culture, the law and much else, but beyond these and energising these must be an increasing desire to handle the Word of God.

We live in days of biblical illiteracy when we need to train and teach more urgently than ever. Central to this will be the public proclamation of the Word and where that flourishes there will be a fruitful environment for other teaching such as smaller classes, one to one Bible teaching and courses such as 'Christianity Explored'. All this flourishes in churches which have a living relation-

ship with the Lord Jesus Christ and are concerned to bring others to him.

We need to be real, we need to be honest. There is a huge task to be done. We need to sit light to everything except the Gospel which is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

Arguing for Expository Preaching

Peter Adam, Principal of Ridley Theological College, Melbourne

Part one: fifteen incontrovertible arguments in favour of expository preaching

In his book *The Contemporary Christian*, John Stott describes the preacher's task as follows: 'To preach is to open up the inspired text with such faithfulness and sensitivity that God's voice is heard and God's people obey him.' I want to argue that best but not the only way of preaching is expository preaching – that is preaching and teaching through books of the Bible one by one.

I'm not arguing for boring expository preaching, nor do I think that the expository method will by itself ensure that the full message of the Bible is heard. We need a sound Biblical Theology to do that. For is quite possible to use the expository method and yet give merely moralistic sermons:

Genesis 1: the importance of creativity
Genesis 2: how we should value family and pets

Genesis 3: all families have problems

Genesis 4: we must learn how to forgive, etc.

We need both biblical theology and expository preaching to show the full depth and breadth of the Bible's teaching. I am arguing that as a general practice expository preaching makes sense and is of great value to the preacher and the congregation. Expository preaching is the preaching of the message of a book of the Bible, usually verse by

verse, paragraph by paragraph, chapter by chapter, by explanation and application of it to the congregation. It was the preaching method of the Reformers, and that of Early Church preachers like Augustine and John Chrysostom.

Here are 15 incontrovertible arguments in favour of expository preaching:

(1) Preaching through the books of the Bible, verse by verse, chapter by chapter, respects and reflects God's authorship. God did not give us a book of quotable quotes, nor a dictionary of useful texts, nor an anthology of inspiring ideas. When God caused the Scriptures to be written the medium that he used was that of books of the Bible. If that was good enough for the author it should be good enough for the preacher.

(2) Expository preaching reflects God's respect for human authors. One of the most beautiful features of the Bible is the way in which God causes his truth to be written and yet does not override the individual writer, but respects their place in history, their vocabulary, their spoken and literary style. If God is so careful to respect the human authors of the Scriptures we should endeavour to do the same by reading, studying, preaching and teaching their books in the order and in the way in which they wrote them.

(3) Expository preaching respects the historical context of each part of the Bible. The Bible is not a set of timeless truths removed from historical context, but each book of the Bible is firmly rooted in history, and the perspective of its human author. We do most justice to this historical context when we preach texts in their context, that is, in the writing in which they occur.

(4) Expository preaching respects the context of salvation history. The unfolding drama of salvation is brought to us within salvation history; and each text, verse, chapter and book has its place within that salvation history. The best way to preach these books is to link them to their place in salvation history, not to extract from them trans-historical, theological, pastoral or devotional themes.

(5) Expository preaching should help us to unfold the deep biblical theology of the Bible, the content and message of God's unfolding revelation, and to see every part of the Bible in the light of the gospel of Christ, and the message of the whole Bible.

(6) Expository preaching preserves biblical shape and balance. It gives the same focus and concentration that God gives in the Bible. Other people's topical preaching inevitably misses this balance. It is more difficult to see the same imbalance in our own topical preaching!

(7) Expository preaching ensures that we preach on difficult topics, verses and books. I would not choose to preach from the text 'I hate divorce' unless forced to do so by a sermon series on Malachi. I would not choose to preach on Romans 9–11, but preaching my way right through Romans forces me to do so. Lectionaries are no help, because modern lectionaries seem to go out of their way to avoid difficult topics, even cutting poems and stories in half to avoid embarrassment. Expository preaching will at least make us preach on the difficult parts of the Bible.

(8) Expository preaching saves time in preparation and presentation. Preachers need to do a lot of work in preparing their sermons and finding the historical context, and need to convey the context of verses on which they preach in the sermon as well. If we move from text to text as we move from sermon to sermon, or if we move from text to text within sermons, we will be less and less inclined to give the context of those texts and more and more inclined to take them out of context. Of course 'the text' is actually the whole book: only preachers think of 'the text' as a short extract!

(9) Expository preaching provides a good model of exegesis. We ought to preach and teach the Bible in a way in which we hope people will read it. People should pick up good models of using the Scripture from us. We do not want to encourage people to flip through the Bible, picking out verses that look encouraging or inviting. If we want people to read the Bible as it is written, that's the way we should preach it.

(10) In Expository preaching each sermon forms part of a divine sequence. The sequence is that of the writer of the book of the Bible. Following this sequence means that our teaching and their learning is cumulative as each sermon prepares the way for the next, and each sermon summarises the message of the last and shows its sequence in biblical thought.

(11) Expository preaching makes sense! Even the most convinced post-modernists among us still read books from beginning to end. This is because it's a remarkably sensible way of reading a book. Why would we adopt a different model in our reading and teaching of the Scriptures?

(12) Expository preaching teaches people the Bible. Its assumption is that the Bible is relevant and effective as it comes from the mouth of God. It assumes that the information in the Bible is important for us; that these things were 'written for our learning'.

(13) Expository preaching provides an accessible, useable and safe model of Bible teaching and preaching. If one of our tasks is to encourage lay people in ministry, then the best thing to do is to provide them with a model of teaching which they can use at any level. It is not good to encourage people to flip through the Bible, taking their favourite verses out of context. It is a good work to show the people a model of Bible teaching that they can use to their benefit and the benefit of those who learn from them.

(14) Expository preaching helps people to avoid repeating their ten favourite themes. Every preacher has ten sermons. The difficulty comes for the preacher and the congregation when they are repeated for the tenth time. Of course, no method can stop the determined preacher from mounting a hobby horse and riding it to death!

(15) Expository preaching follows God's syllabus for us. One helpful way of viewing the Bible is to see it as God's syllabus. In it God lays out the way of salvation and what human beings need to learn in order to turn to Jesus Christ in faith and obedience. The Bible is the syllabus that God has provided – why would we replace it with another of our own invention?

One of the Homilies on the reading and knowledge of Scripture includes the following memorable words: 'let us reverently hear and read Holy

Scriptures which is the food of the soul. Let us diligently search for the well of life in the books of the New and Old Testament and not run to the stinking puddles of men's traditions, devised by man's imagination.'

Why is it that Evangelicals are so enthusiastic in theory about the centrality and importance of the Scriptures, but have in many places given up on the serious educational task of teaching them to their people and of using them in evangelism?

Part two: five completely effective ways to avoid boredom in expository preaching

In part one I wrote of fifteen incontrovertible arguments in favour of expository preaching. Those who oppose expository preaching often do so because they think it must breed boredom. And those who practise expository preaching sometimes intentionally or unintentionally impose boredom on their hearers, perhaps as a kind of spiritual discipline! In my chapter in the book *The Anglican Evangelical Crisis* (ed. Melvin Tinker, Christian Focus Publications, 1995), I wrote an appeal for 'passionately applied expository Biblical Preaching', and in this article I want to show five ways to avoid boredom in expository preaching. We can be expository in theological method without being rigidly and predictably expository in style.

1. Be grabbed by the excitement, wonderful privilege, and awesome duty of speaking God's words to his people and his world!

God has spoken, and our task is to summon people to hear the very words of God. In teaching through the Bible, we can follow God's syllabus for the education of the human race. As we explain what the Bible says, we explain what God has said. As we bring the message of the Bible in the words of the Bible with the purpose of the Bible,

God's voice is heard, God rules his people, and God calls humans to faith and obedience. It is a sign of Liberal theology to set aside what God has said in order to set the agenda and content of the sermon by the issues that we humans want to raise. It is a sign of Roman Catholic theology to give too much room to human traditions. I am amazed when Evangelicals follow these theological methods in practice in their preaching, when they set aside as too difficult or irrelevant what God is saying in his words of Scripture, or preach about evangelical traditions of the Christian life or church practice. It seems bizarre to assert the authority, relevance, and sufficiency of Scripture, and then not put it into practice in their preaching. We must be aware of contemporary social analysis, community needs, human issues, and what seekers after God are looking for, but while this forms the context of our preaching, and shapes our application, it must not create the agenda. It is God's right to address us and we must listen to his words.

Kevin Vanhoozer in his book *Is there a meaning in this text?* (Apollos, 1998) has argued for the moral imperative in allowing the human author of a book to say what he or she wants to say, without being ignored by those who intend to be readers. The same moral imperative applies to our treatment of God, the author of Scripture (as it also applies to our treatment of the human authors of Scripture). We preachers must practise and model to our people the priority of letting God speak in the method and way that he has chosen, in the words of Scripture.

2. Release the eloquence of the text! Let the text speak: let God speak!

It is one of the weaknesses of our tradition of expository preaching that it is so formed by the distancing and analytical style of commentaries. It helps to ask the question 'What is this text trying to do?' or perhaps even better

'What is God doing in this text?' not just 'What does this text mean?' It also helps to think of words as speech-acts, and of the Bible as 'God's mighty speech-acts' (see Kevin Vanhoozer in P. Satterthwaite and D. Wright, (eds.), *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture*, Eerdmans 1994). We can then ask the question 'What is the intended result of these speech-acts?' Let me give an example from a sermon series, where I am preaching through Romans 12–16, having already preached through Romans 1–8 and 9–11.

One excellent commentary gives the following analysis of Romans 12:

- 1-2 Our relationship to God
- 3-8 Our relationship to ourselves
- 9-16 Our relationship to one another
- 17-21 Our relationship to our enemies

This helps us to understand what the text is about, but not what the text is doing, or the response that Paul wanted in his readers and hearers. It is good and necessary analysis (What is the text about?) but not so helpful for the next step towards the sermon: What does God want the hearers of the text and sermon to do?

Here are my sermon titles:

- 1-2 Present your bodies!
- 1-2 Renew your minds!
- 3-8 Join the body!
- 3-8 Do your ministry!
- 9-21 Let love be genuine!

The sermon should move beyond information and education to edification. It must be active ministry, discipling the body of Christ as intentionally as we disciple individuals within the body of Christ. We must not muffle the text by remote analysis. Clear analysis is a necessary part of the preparation, but should not govern the presentation. But we should use our analysis to show the logic or sequence of the text, and thus be able to avoid that familiar phrase, 'And now we look at verse 10'! The well-prepared preacher will be able to speak two languages, the language of the Bible and the language of the people. Bringing these two together

will help the people to hear the text speak. To release the eloquence of the text is to let the text speak, to let it do what it wants to do, to let God say what he wants to say through the text.

3. Express the particularity of the text!

We must resist the temptation to take texts out of context, to make them timeless truths. The excitement of the Bible is found in its historical particularity, its gradual revelation, its biblical theology, its salvation history, its move from promise to fulfilment, from Christ promised to Christ revealed.

Its creative tension is found in the fact that it never sinks to the level of 'The Christian Life', or 'Five hints for happy families', or 'Six clues for a successful church'. It does not reduce Christianity to a formula. Formulas are useful for new Christians, but do not bring about mature Christians or mature churches, for formulas always reduce the Bible's message.

We must avoid our hobby-horses, and avoid what we always say when we see the word 'faith' or 'Lord' or 'church' or 'gift' or 'Spirit'. We must search the text to find what it is saying in particular. The key is what we leave out in order for this text to speak with clarity and particularity.

It is only expository preaching which will in the long term do justice to the text in its context, and so only this way of preaching will communicate the exciting particularity of the text.

Generality is boring; particularity is exciting!

4. Employ as much variety as possible!

On the following page is a table which can help us to employ as much variety as possible, while continuing to expound the Scriptures as God caused them to be written, that is, in books.

Of course the choices we make will largely be determined by what the text

Address	Enquirers New Christians Mature Christians
Stories	Personal Overseas Everyday people
Application	Society Our church Daily lives
Approach	Rebuke Encouragement Challenge
Exhortation	At the beginning All through At the end
Contemporary Comments	At the beginning All through At the end
Context	The chapter The Testament The Bible
Model of Interpretation	How to understand a verse How to understand a chapter The context of biblical theology
Model of Interpretation	How to read a parable How to use biblical history How to read narrative
Background Information	Literary or archaeological Historical The author or characters

is saying, but there is still plenty of scope for variety. The true artist is the one who can use a given form, but use it creatively. We should also note that different genres of biblical material call for different kinds of expository styles. The verse-by-verse approach which can work well in Paul's letters is not the best method for the book of Job! And for variety's sake we should sometimes do Paul's letters in big chunks, so the people can see the big argument, and not get lost in the detail. Predictability is deadly: variety is fascinating.

5. Release the passions of the text!

We should release the passions of the text, as the Bible calls us to faith. Here are some relevant New Testa-

ment words: call, denounce, warn, rebuke, command, encourage, appeal, urge, debate, contend, persuade, convince, insist, cry out, remind.

Calvin commented on the preacher's task in these words: 'If a man do no more than expound Holy Scripture it slips away, and we be not touched to the quick. Therefore if teaching be not helped with exhortations it is cold and pierces not our hearts. We add a vehemency to the end that the doctrine may touch their hearts to the quick, and that they not only know what is good but be moved to follow it' (*Sermons on Timothy and Titus*, reprinted by Banner of Truth, 1983).

We should be passionate because God is passionate; Jesus is passion-

ate; the Holy Spirit is passionate; and because Scripture is passionate.

We can subdue the passions of the text in these ways:

- o merely lecture, preach, or teach in an academic mode
- o never apply
- o never exhort
- o never refer to yourself
- o have so much to say that there is no time to make best use of it
- o have too little to say, and so repeat it endlessly
- o preach timeless truths
- o use clues to passion which do not communicate to your congregation
- o get tired doing other things so not have enough energy to prepare or preach with passion.

We can release the passions of the text in these ways:

- o discover and communicate the passion of the text
- o know and communicate with clarity the message of the text
- o increase the contrasts in the text
- o make the most of the illustrative language of the text
- o ask not only 'what does the text mean?' but also 'what is the text trying to do?' or 'what is God trying to do through this text?'
- o impersonations
- o have a dramatic shape to the sermon
- o use key words in the text to dramatic effect
- o pauses and questions
- o relevant application
- o use the Bible as we are instructed, to 'convince, rebuke, encourage' (2 Timothy 4: 2).

God is not boring. His words are not boring. We must work hard so that we do not make his words boring!

Good preaching!

Seeking a Biblical Balance in Dealing with the Arab-Israeli Conflict

Imad N. Shehadeh, Th.D.

Background of this Study

There are several factors that serve as a background to this study. First is the theological factor expressed in imbalance in presenting the Christian message regarding the present state of Israel. Second is the political factor expressed in unwarranted Christian support for one political entity over another. Third is the religious factor, expressed in the position that Islam holds towards present Israel, and how this is possibly affecting the views of the church in the Middle East today.

The Theological Factor

The issue of primary concern is regarding two opposing perspectives of eschatology as it relates to the present: the Western dispensational premillennial stance in contrast to the Arab Christian stance, whether it is premillennial or amillennial. The two represent opposite extremes, not necessarily in what they hold theologically, but at least in how their message is communicated.

Dispensational premillennialism is often viewed as a system that is in favour of the existence of the present state of Israel to the point that they are pro-Zionist. Unqualified equations are often made of present

world scenes with eschatological realities not yet fulfilled. This is aptly described by Robert Clouse:

Another aspect of premillennialism that troubles many Christians is the effort to identify the 'signs of the times.' Often such occurrences as natural disasters, apostasy in the churches, technological advancements and the rise of authoritarian political leaders are cited as proof that 'the end is near' and that the Second Coming of Christ is 'at hand' or imminent.' At the present time attention is focused on the Middle East and the fortunes of the nation of Israel as pre-eminent signs. Aside from the fact that seeking for signs can lead down the blind alley of date setting, the tendency to identify God's case with Zionism and the nation of Israel can lend support to policies which do not make for peace on earth. The United States could well be drawn into war in the Middle East and many evangelicals might be responsible for the attitudes that can lead to that conflict.¹

The tendency to elevate the state of Israel is not unwarranted. It is based on God's promises to the nation Israel. As a result, premillennialists stress the unconditional elements of God's promises to the nation. Though this is legitimate, are there yet limits that can be defined? What assurances are

there that the equations referred to above are legitimate or illegitimate?

On the other extreme is found the stance of Christian Arabs. Though most of them tend to be amillennial in their views, yet some are premillennial, but with a de-emphasis or an exclusion of the role of the nation of Israel in the millennium. Louis Hamada is a representative Arab premillennialist who, in his book *God Loves the Arabs Too*, sees no special place of Israel in the future, nor does he view the Abrahamic covenant as belonging to Israel, but rather to all the redeemed of God's children.² His eschatology is more in conformity with the amillennial position than with premillennialism. Reaction to Hamada's book by dispensationalists exposes the issues that are of concern in this present paper. The following excerpt appeared in a review by Eugene H. Merrill of Hamada's book:

He correctly distinguishes between Israel as a modern nation and Israel as the chosen people of the Lord but unfortunately perceives the latter as merely a 'prophetic clock' by which one can view the historical and eschatological purposes of God. That is, he concedes that the Jewish people were the chosen vehicle through which God's saving purposes were mediated in Christ, but he appears to find no

place for a renewed and restored Israel that will be the instrument of God's redemptive work in the future. He thus relegates all the prophecies about an Israel to come to Jesus Christ and His church. It seems that in his effort to promote the need to recognize God's love for the Arabs (and all peoples) Hamada has overlooked the ongoing role that God has for His covenant people Israel. One can (and must) allow the Scriptures to teach the universal love of the Lord while emphasizing the role that a redeemed and reconstituted Israel will play in the future implementation of that saving design. Accepting God's covenant promises to Israel need not negate one's love for the Arabs and the need for Christians to be actively involved in evangelism among these people God surely desires to save.³

Reading Hamad's book exposes some of the deep prejudices he has against the Jewish people. The feeling of animosity is generally present among many Arab Christians against the Jews. This feeling radically affects the way the Bible is read, and consequently, the view of eschatology. The following statement by an Arab university professor illustrates how political stance has affected one's hermeneutical method. Mrs Hanan Mikhail Ashrawi speaks against the Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank of Palestine:

I believe that we have heard something that is really chilling and terrifying. It's a problem that we face daily. Settlements and settlers, people we've heard today, claim divine right. And this is something that is of extreme danger. Such absolutism and such moral blindness, it seems to me, has led to a great deal of loss of life and intransigence. God and holy books should be relegated to matters of spiritualism rather than translated as land tracts or deals of lands. You cannot reduce God to a real-estate agent. There are spiritual facts and there are moral facts and there are historical facts, and even St. Augustine showed you how to interpret the Bible allegorically [emphasis mine].⁴

This situation surfaces several ques-

tions that need to be answered. First, what is a safe hermeneutical method in approaching sensitive biblical texts that speak of Israel? Second, what are the main features of the present Arab-Israeli conflict as it relates to Scripture?⁵ Third, how can the present Arab-Israeli conflict help in evaluating the premillennial theological position? Fourth, what are some of the extreme positions of the church in the West as well as the church in the East regarding the present state of Israel? Fifth, what are, if any, the distinguishing features between present-day Israel and Israel as the chosen people of God? Sixth, what constitutes the regathering of the nation of Israel to her land? Seventh, what is the duty of Christians today towards the present nation of Israel and the current situation in the Middle East?

The Political Factor

The conflict between the Jews and the Arabs is merely an extension of the Isaac-Ishmael tension centuries earlier. What makes the conflict even more critical is the fact that today Western Christianity in general takes its stance with Israel against the Palestinians, or at least it appears so to the latter. An Arab visiting an average American church today would hear enough pro-Israeli statements made to make him or her never return to church. It is important therefore to grasp the picture of the political strife over the land of Palestine. In order to do so, a brief synopsis of the history of this ancient land will be given as presented in a televised discussion on prime time on ABC News on April 27, 1988, in which representatives from both sides were present.

A Historical Survey of the Land⁶

The geography of the land of Palestine 'has been redefined by conquest after conquest, and each successive empire has engraved its mark'.⁷ The remains of Roman pillars, Byzantine and Crusader forts, Saracene palaces and mosques, and Christian churches

can be seen everywhere in the city. Surrounding the entire Old City is a Turkish wall built by the Ottomans during their 400-year reign. 'Other empires left less visible but equally valuable footprints. After freeing the Jews from captivity in Babylon, the Persians allowed them to rebuild a second sacred temple on Mount Moriah, on the same spot where Solomon's original temple stood, although that second temple was also destroyed – this time by the Romans – its remaining Western Wall symbolizes the political claim of the Jews to this land.'⁸

Rabbi Wolfe Kelman of the Jewish Theological Seminary asserts, 'This relationship of God, a people and a land which he promised them, to which they are eternally bound, is something that every Jew is constantly conscious and subconsciously aware of.'⁹ The Israelis claim the covenant God made with Abraham, promising his descendants the land forever.

The boundaries of present-day Israel coincides with the same territory which was conquered by Joshua from the Canaanites nearly 3,000 years ago. The question is put, 'But if those Canaanites had descendants, might they not be able to claim historical precedence over the Jews?'¹⁰ Palestinians today claim a link with the Canaanites, not racially, but rather in a heritage of custom and traditions. The same link is claimed with other peoples who have invaded the land before Israel did. An example would be the Philistines from whose Greek name the name Palestine comes. 'That racial mix, the Palestinians say, reflects the very history of the land, a land defined by conquest after conquest. Those whose heritage reflects that mixture of influence say they are the land's true descendants. Their claim is one of historical continuity.'¹¹

The Jewish Perspective of the Establishment of the State of Israel

Today the Jews of Israel believe that, though the price of lives was great that created the present state of Israel, yet Palestine is the best place of all for a Jew to live. It is a

*safe haven in a world where, all too often, Jewish blood came cheap. A century ago, vicious anti-Semitism was sweeping Russia and Europe, and out of that came a movement to create a Jewish home in the ancient land of Zion. The movement was called Zionism. Its author, a Hungarian journalist named Theodore Herzl. . . . The idea of the Jewish state as an answer to the problem of Jewish inferiority and inequality and homelessness became real with Herzl; in 1897, when he gathered a congress of Jews – the first Zionist congress – to proclaim the great cry that the Jews who wish it will have their state. . . . But where? Herzl asked the Turks for part of Palestine. And then the British for Cyprus. For a time, the British offered to resettle the Jews in what is now Uganda. But even as Herzl's search went on, many Jews were already heading for Palestine, the land the Bible said God had given to the children of Abraham.*¹²

So the Jewish immigrants arrived in the land initially in small numbers, and settled here and there. "The immigrants arrived with a cherished idea of what the Biblical homeland would be like. What they found was a hostile land filled with swamps and snakes and scorpions. And Arabs."¹³ An Israeli writer says, "Nobody of us dared to go far away at night. Because it was dangerous."¹⁴

To Jews, the Arabs were mysterious, dangerous. To Arabs, the Jews and their European ways were just as alien. So they lived side by side, but not together. . . . In the years that followed, Jewish settlements sprouted throughout the land. By 1914 there were 100,000 Jews in Palestine. Chaim Weitzman was now the leader of the Zionist movement, and making believers out of the Brit-

*ish. In 1917, they approved the Balfour Declaration, endorsing a national homeland for the Jews in Palestine.*¹⁵

From that point on the Jewish national home became a legal and political concept. With the end of World War I, Palestine fell into the hands of the British, and the Zionist dream seemed not too far out of reach.

The Jews claim that they were not thinking of conquest, but merely of defence. This defence philosophy especially began when Arabs attacked the Jewish headquarters in Jerusalem after a dispute over the Wailing Wall. Sixty Jews were killed, followed by 135 more, and 399 wounded. The British responded by limiting immigration. But the tens of thousands of Jews who were already there had transformed Palestine, creating cities with stores, factories, schools, and socialist compounds called kibbutzes.

More Jews headed for Palestine as a result of Hitler's treatment. This caused the Arabs to rebel more, and consequently, the British to gradually withdraw their support of Zionism and to close the doors for immigrants. Between 1945 and 1948, 63 full ships set sail to Palestine, but only five made it through illegally. There was much emotion as those who made it kissed the sands as they landed on the shore.

Meanwhile, the Jews carried out campaigns of assault on the British. In July 1946 they killed 91 people in an attack on the King David Hotel, the British headquarters. The fate of Palestine was now in the hands of the United Nations. The latter approved a plan to partition the land between the Arabs and the Jews in 1947.

To the Jews the reason the Arabs refused the partition of 1947 was that they wanted all of Palestine. They claim that four days after Deir-Yassin a medical convoy was ambushed in which seventy-seven doctors and nurses were massacred by the Arabs.

The day that David Ben-Gurion proclaimed Israel's independence, the

armies of seven Arab nations marched to wipe away the Jewish state. The Arabs of many villages ran away, leaving their villages, assuming that the Arab armies were going to finish the Jews off. No one forced the Arabs out of their home.

In 1967 the Palestinians lost all of the land when Israel attacked the Arab forces before the latter were supposed to attack. In six days Israel proved to be superior. The Jews finally reached the wailing wall. Israel established itself as a major power in the Middle East. The Zionist dream had become true.

Israel sees the Palestinians (especially the PLO) as always extreme and not to be trusted. Nevertheless, they maintain that conditions of Arabs under Israel are better than the same under Muslims.

The Palestinian Perspective of the Establishment of the State of Israel

From the Palestinian perspective, the Palestinians who live in the land of Israel, both Muslims and Christians, make several claims to their right to the land of Palestine:

*In 1917, Palestinians demonstrated against the Balfour Declaration and British support for a Jewish homeland. After all, they then represented some 90 percent of the population Yet the Balfour declaration had, in effect, called them intruders, referring to them as 'the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine'. Palestinians, who have lived under occupation since the 16th century, felt that the chance to decide their own future had been stripped away again, this time by the mighty British.*¹⁶

The Palestinians claim to have cultivated the land for 1000 years. The Balfour Declaration was in effect a declaration of war against them. They say that if God had promised the land to the Jews, why has not Allah informed them of that?

By 1920 the Jews had 40 Zionist colonies. Being under British rule since 1918 the Arabs could not stop

the flow of Jewish immigrants to the land. This led to the first Arab uprising against the British in 1936, which lasted for three years. 'Faced with the upcoming demands of a world war, Britain unleashed its full military power against the Palestinians, and smashed their revolt. Some 5,000 Palestinians died. Fifteen thousand were wounded.'¹⁷ The British simultaneously armed the Jews and disarmed the Arabs, exiling the latter's political leadership. The Arabs were now defenceless against Jewish expansionism, which wanted to leave no room for Arabs.

To the Palestinians, the partition of 1947 constituted a usurpation of their rights to the land in which they lived for centuries. The Jews occupied 6.5% of the land but were given control over 55% of the land. This called for a civil war.

*Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were driven from their homes, creating a new generation of misery. The fact that the Palestinian exodus went largely unnoticed by the world was further proof of the terrible isolation and powerlessness these people suffered.*¹⁸

One particular event in April of 1948 became a symbol to Palestinians of Israeli brutality: the massacre of Deir-Yassin. On that morning Israeli soldiers committed a cold-blooded atrocity. 'As many as 250 Palestinian men, women and children were slaughtered. Some women were raped, then shot dead. Bodies were mutilated and stuffed down wells.'¹⁹ As a result many Palestinians left their villages for fear that the same thing would be repeated. About one month later, British rule ended and Israel became a state.

The Palestinians claim that, between 1948 and 1950, Israel destroyed 379 of 475 Arab villages, bulldozing or dynamiting homes and levelling the land. Faced with their tragic and hopeless situation, the Palestinians looked with pride at the Palestinian Liberation Organization which was formed in 1964. The PLO guerrillas are seen as freedom fighters who

launched attacks against Israel and other targets in order to draw attention to the plight of the Palestinians.

The Palestinians in the occupied territories of 1967 claim that they are denied the right to self-determination. Even Arabs in Israel proper are treated like a minority and are kept under control. Israel has further established settlements in the occupied lands of the West Bank in order to keep the land from Arabs.

In all, Palestinians believe that Israel came into existence in an immoral way. To the Arabs it is immoral to justify the persecution of one people to relieve the persecution of another. They maintain that the Jews had a premeditated effort to dispossess the Palestinian people, and that Zionism gave no thought to the people of the land. Arabs also assert that if a fraction of the money, time, and effort that was spent in convincing the West of the rightness of their efforts had been spent in cultivating the friendship of the Arabs and explaining to them the visions of Zionism, the outcome could have been entirely different. David Ben-Gurion, first president, never studied Islam or the Arabic language.

The Palestinians claim that most of the Jews use the promises of the Bible only in a political way. They maintain that Israel cannot make up its mind whether it is a religious or a secular state. Furthermore, Arabs in general assert that negative attitudes towards the PLO ignore the root causes for their actions, the context in which their actions take place, and terrorist actions committed by Israel prior and during its establishment, as well as those committed by the state in the present. Palestinians argue that the use of the term 'terrorism' to label PLO activities is unfair. To them it is a depreciation of the value of language.

Conclusion

This survey of the history of the political situation between Arabs and Jews exposes the difficulty of communicat-

ing the premillennial view of Scripture to the Arab individual. The tendency for Western Christianity to support Israel and Zionism may be founded on theological grounds, as well as on sympathetic feelings for the sufferings of the Jewish people, but it totally ignores the injustices that are committed against the Palestinian people by the Israelis themselves, and thus exposes anti-Arab prejudice. On the other hand, Arab Christianity tends to be so anti-Jewish that it is pro-Islamic. It allows itself to have the same negative feelings of prejudice and animosity against the Jews to the point of not being able to see a possible divine plan for this nation in the future.

The Religious Factor

The third factor that forms the background to this paper is the religious factor. What is here specifically in mind is the pressure that Islam exerts on Arab Christian theology. Arab Christianity is but a minority in the world. It is largely based within Muslim lands. Because of this, much of the thinking of the Arab Christian church regarding the nation Israel has been shaped to some degree by Islamic thinking. Therefore it may be pertinent to examine the Muslim views on the nation Israel, expressed in the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam.

The Qur'an does not agree with the Bible on much of its presentation of historical events. It portrays the biblical God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the God of Abraham, Ishmael and Muhammad. Furthermore, Muslim tradition has it that it was not Abraham offering Isaac on Mount Moriah where the temple was built. Instead it was Abraham offering Ishmael in Mecca where the Kaaba was built. Examples of disagreement with biblical accounts abound.²⁰ But the Qur'an speaks of Israel in clear terms. The following is a brief synopsis.

First, Israel as Made of Twelve Tribes

According to the Qur'an Israel originally contained righteous people, and God acted with them accordingly. He divided the nation into twelve tribes with Moses as their leader:

*Of the people of Moses there is a nation who guide by the truth, and by it act with justice. We (God) divided them into twelve tribes of nations. We directed Moses by inspiration.*²¹

Second, Israel as Favoured of God

The Qur'an declares that Israel was favoured of God above all other nations of the world:

*Remember Moses said to his people: 'O my people! Call in remembrance the favour of God unto you, when He produced prophets among you, made you kings, and gave you what He had not given to any other among the peoples.'*²²

[God speaking] *O children of Israel! Call to mind the special favour which I bestowed upon you, and that I preferred you to all other peoples.*²³

And,

[God speaking] *We did aforetime grant to the children of Israel the Book, the power of command, and prophethood; we gave them, for sustenance, things good and pure; and We favoured them above the nations, and We granted them clear signs in affairs.*²⁴

The special favours given to Israel were the following: preference over all other nations (Al-Maida 5:22; Al-Baqara 2:47); revelation (Al-Israa 17:2; Al-Ghafer 40:53-54; Al-Maida 5:47; Al-Jathiah 45:16-17); deliverance from enemies (Al-Baqara 2:49; Al-Tah 20:77-78, 80-82); splitting of the sea (Al-Baqara 2:50); giving of manna from heaven (Al-Baqara 2:57); giving of water from the rock (Al-Baqara 2:60-61); and giving of the land of Canaan (Al-Baqara 2:58; Al-Aa'raaf 7:161; Al-Maida 5:23).

Third, Israel Assigned the Land of Palestine

It is remarkable that the Qur'an declares that the land of Palestine was given as an inheritance to the Jews. Of course, this land is said not to be their right today. The Qur'an tells the story of the book of Numbers, of the twelve spies, of the two who only had faith to conquer the land, of the forty years postponement of entry due to unbelief, and condemns unbelief for not claiming the land of Palestine which is assigned to them! Moses speaks to the Israelites:

'O my people, enter the holy land which God has assigned (prescribed) to you, and turn not back ignominiously, for then will you be overthrown, to your own ruin.' They said, 'O Moses, in this land are a people of exceeding strength: never shall we enter it until they leave it: if (once) they leave, then we enter.' (But) among (their) God-fearing men were two on whom God had bestowed His grace. They said, 'Assault them at the (proper) gate. When you enter it you will be victors. But on God put your trust if you are believers.' They said, 'O Moses, we will never enter it so long as they are in it. Go forth, you and your Lord, and do battle; we will be sitting here.' He said, 'O my Lord, I own none but myself and my brother, so separate us from the ungodly people.' He (God) said, 'Therefore the land will be forbidden them for forty years. They will wander in the earth, so do not be sorry for the ungodly people' [emphasis added].²⁵

It is clear from the above that the Qur'an teaches that it was God's will for the Israelites to claim and possess the land. The fact that it was forbidden them for a time meant that God's promise to them for the land continued in spite of the disbelief of the previous generation. It is more amazing that the Qur'an still declared that the Israelites had claim to the land after the Babylonian captivity, and they were to return to it then.

And We decreed for the children of Israel in the Book, 'you shall do corruption in

the earth twice, and you shall ascend exceeding high.' So, when the promise of the first of these came to pass, We sent against you servants of Ours, men of great might, and they went through the most inner parts of your homes, and it was a promise performed. Then We gave back to you the turn to prevail over them, and We succoured you with wealth and children, and We made you greater in number. 'If you do good, it is your own souls you do good to, and if you do evil it is to them likewise.' Then, when the promise of the second came to pass, We sent against you Our servants to discountenance you, and to enter the Temple, as they entered it the first time, and to destroy utterly that which they ascended to.²⁶

The above demonstrates that the prosperity of Israel in her land remains as she remains obedient to God. Whatever the case is, the Qur'an seems to speak of Israel in relation to her land.

Fourth, Israel Having a Conditional Covenant with God

Israel had a covenant with God, but it was a conditional covenant. It is a Mosaic-like covenant which promises reward for obedience and punishment for disobedience:

*O ye children of Israel, We delivered you from your enemy, and We made a covenant with you on the right side of Mount Sinai, and We sent down to you Manna and quails.*²⁷

*Children of Israel! Call to mind the special favour which I bestowed upon you, and fulfil your covenant with Me as I fulfil My covenant with you, and fear none but Me.*²⁸

God did aforetime take a covenant with the children of Israel, and We appointed twelve captains among them and God said: 'I am with you: if ye but establish regular prayers, practise regular charity, believe in My messengers, honour and assist them, and loan to God a beautiful loan, verily I will wipe out from you your evils, and admit you to gardens with rivers flowing beneath; but if any of you, after this, deny belief in God, he has truly

wandered from the path of rectitude.' But because of their breach of their covenant, we cursed them, and made their hearts grow hard by making them change the words from their right places and forget a good part of the message that was sent them, nor wilt you cease to find them ever bent on new deceits except a few whom I will forgive, and overlook their misdeeds, for God loves those who are kind [emphasis mine].²⁹

In the above passage the character of the covenant God made with Israel is as follows: first, it was made with the twelve tribes of Israel; second, it promised blessings on the condition that Israel practise prayer, giving, honouring prophets, and the offering of sacrifices (referred to elsewhere in sura Al-Baqara 2:67); third, the blessings promised are: his presence, the covering of sins (the same Hebrew cognate word kafr is used!), and paradise (described figuratively as gardens with rivers); fourth, Israel broke the covenant by disbelief; fifth, as a result God cursed the Israelites by hardening their hearts till this day so that they corrupted and forgot the teachings that they received; sixth, those of the Jewish race who walk uprightly are but a few; seventh, these upright along with all who are upright will receive forgiveness of sin. Others are said elsewhere not to be loved by him.³⁰

Furthermore, Israel is said to be judged: *It was only after knowledge had been granted to them that they fell into schisms, through insolent envy among themselves. Verily your Lord will judge between them on the day of judgment as to those matters in which they set up differences.*³¹

It is here where the Qur'an parts ways with the Bible. The conditional relationship that God had with Israel is according to the Qur'an the only way he deals with all the people of the world. This conditional factor extends not only to Jews, but also to Christians. For example, Jews,

Christians, and Sabaeans are assured of a good destiny only if they do good works: *Those who believe, and those who are Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans, who believe in God and the last day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them there is no fear, nor shall they grieve.*³²

Not only so, but God is said to cause the disobedient to do more acts of evil, and then be punished more for it. Of the Christians and Jews it declares:

*Of those who say 'We are Christians,' We did make a covenant, but they forgot a good part of what they were reminded of. So We have stirred up among them enmity and hatred, till the day of resurrection; and God will assuredly tell them of the things they wrought.*³³

And,

*The Jews and the Christians say, 'We are the sons of God, and His beloved ones.' Say: 'Why then does He chastise you for your sins? No; you are mortals, of His creating; He forgives whom He will, and He chastises whom He will.' For to God belongs the kingdom of the heavens and of the earth, and all that is between them; to Him is destiny.*³⁴

It can be concluded that the Qur'an knows no other covenant but a Mosaic-like covenant. While the conditional element is found in the Bible, it is not limited to it. As will be seen, there are also unconditional elements in God's relationship to Israel and to the whole world.

Summary

The Qur'an teaches that Israel was a nation that was favoured of God above all other nations of the world. It was divided by God into twelve tribes, with

Moses as their leader. To Israel was assigned the land of Palestine which they were to conquer by trusting God. The special favours it received from God were: the reception of revelation; deliverance from enemies; special care of food and water; and the assigning of the land of Canaan. Israel had only one covenant with God, that of the Mosaic Covenant, which promised blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. Israel however broke this covenant by disbelief and disobedience. As a result God cursed the Israelites by hardening their hearts till this day. Those of the Jewish race who walk uprightly are but a few. The Israeli nation will be judged at the day of resurrection. The Qur'an is anthropocentric in its salvation. Everything depends on man's merit. God's relationship to Israel and to the world is totally conditional. It is here where the Qur'an parts ways with the Bible, which presents, in addition to the conditional covenant, an unconditional covenant.

Conclusion

This study has introduced three main factors that serve as a background to this study. The theological factor refers to the premillennial imbalance in presenting the Christian message. The political factor refers to the unwarranted Christian support for one political entity over another. The religious factor refers to the position that Islam holds towards present Israel, and how this is possibly affecting the views of the church in the Middle East today. These issues can be summarized in the chart below.

The more one moves to the right or left of the chart, the more extreme the position becomes. Western

Zionism	←	Judaism	←	Western Christianity	←	Biblical Balance?	→	Arab Christianity	→	Islam	→	Palestinian
				1. Pro-Israeli					1. Pro-Palestinian			
				2. Anti-Arab					2. Anti-Jewish			
				3. Stress on the unconditional elements					3. Stress on the conditional elements			

Christianity tends to be pro-Israeli in its political position, anti-Arab in its religious position, and advocate of the unconditional elements in its theological position. Arab Christianity on the other hand tends to be pro-Palestinian in its political position, anti-Jewish in its religious position, and advocate of the conditional elements in its theological position. What is the biblical and balanced position?

Conditional or Unconditional

Much of the confusion regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict is dissipated by maintaining a balance between the conditional and unconditional aspects of God's promises and covenants with Israel. The Arabs and pro-Arabs emphasize the former, while the Jews and pro-Jews emphasize the latter.

Beginning with Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 God promised the nation Israel a land, a posterity, and a blessing. The hermeneutical method adopted in this study attempts to view each passage as the original readers did, i.e., in its plain intent of the author or authors. This study attempts to show that both conditional and unconditional elements are present in God's relation to this nation. What is the evidence for this phenomenon, and how can the two elements be harmonized?³⁵

The Conditional Elements in the Promises to Israel

The conditional elements in God's promises to Israel are seen in four major areas: first, in conditions present in the original call of Abraham; second, in conditions present in the development of the call of Abraham; third, in conditions present in the Mosaic Covenant; fourth, in conditions reflected in the history of Israel.

*First, Conditions Present in the Original Call of Abraham*³⁶

It will be seen that there is a difference between the promises given to Abraham beginning in the original

call (Gen. 12:1-3), and the covenant made with Abraham later on (Gen. 15:1-21). The former covers the conditional aspect while the latter the unconditional. The conditional aspect of the promises given to Abraham is first seen in his original call (Gen. 12:1-3). This call is composed of six promises built around two commands. Each command is followed by three promises. This provides the passage with symmetry, which lends strength to the meaning and which is often missed in translations of the Bible.³⁷

The First Command. The first command given to Abraham is that he is to 'go' (Gen. 12:1). Cassuto demonstrates the personal use of this expression by other examples from Scripture, and concludes that the Genesis 12:1 call stresses the individual person of Abraham for a specific mission. He paraphrases the verse thus: 'Go, you by yourself, or only with those who are united to you in unique relationship, go on the way that belongs to you alone, and leave behind your kinsfolk amongst whom you have lived till now and who do not wish or are not able to associate themselves with you in your new way.'³⁸ Abraham's obedience to the command to go will bring him three promises: God will make him a great nation, God will bless him, and God will make his name great.

The first imperative to go is followed by three cohortatives in a sequence. These cohortatives, following an imperative, express a purpose or result. In other words, it is obvious that if Abraham never obeyed the command to go and leave his original home, he would not receive the three promises. Obedience demonstrates faith in the God who calls, which in turn demonstrates qualification to receive what God promises. The first promise was that God will make him a great nation, which must have been overwhelming to an old man who had no children and whose wife was barren.

The second promise was that he is to be blessed. The concept of blessing is

broad in Scripture, but can be summarized as the bestowal of all good and the protection from all evil.³⁹ The benedictory words God spoke to Moses in Numbers 6:24-26 provide an appropriate elaboration: blessing involves first, protection, 'The Lord bless you, and keep you'; second, the imparting of grace, 'The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you'; third, lasting happiness and peace, 'The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.'⁴⁰ Blessing includes physical prosperity and fertility.⁴¹ H. G. Link explains that this physical vitality is expressed in having many descendants, as well as having peace with the world around. He says:

The nature of the blessing is that of the conferring and transference of beneficial power, which produces fertility in men (Gen. 24:34-36) and in live stock and lands (Gen. 30:25ff.). Blessing works vertically in the continued growth of succeeding generations (expressed in the genealogies of Gen. 5 and 11:10ff.). Horizontally, it effects peace, security from enemies, good fortune and well-being for a tribe or group (expressed most comprehensively in the concept of 'shalom', well-being).⁴²

Blessing may also be spiritual. This is especially true of Abraham as the New Testament testifies: 'in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith' (Gal. 3:14).

Not only was Abraham to be a great nation and be blessed, but the third promise adds that his name will be great. The name is identifiable with the person himself, i.e., Abraham's worth will be great in the world.⁴³

The first three promises to Abraham are followed by three more promises that relate to the world in its relationship to Abraham. The two sets of promises are interjected by a second command.

The Second Command. The second command given to Abraham is that he is to be a blessing (Gen. 12:2b). The

implication is that the preceding words enable Abraham to carry out this command. But he still must comply anyway. Examples of this are seen in Genesis 20:7, 'and he will pray for you and you shall live' and Genesis 42:18, 'Do this and live.'⁴⁴ If Abraham obeys the first command to go, he will inherit the promises of being a great nation, being blessed, and having a great name. These promises will in turn give Abraham the sufficiency to obey the second command of being a blessing.

The context of Genesis 12:1-3 indicates that the first three promises enable Abraham to be the *example* of blessing, while the next three promises make possible for him to be the *channel* of blessing. For Abraham to be a blessing means for him to be rightly related to God in a way that would qualify him to be both an example as well as a channel of blessing to the whole world. What an awesome responsibility does Abraham and his descendants have towards the rest of the human race.

The three promises following the second command are: first, God will bless those who bless Abraham; second, God must curse the one who despises Abraham; third, in Abraham all the families of the earth will be blessed. While the first set of promises centre on Abraham being blessed, the second set of promises centre on others sharing the blessing. In the former, Abraham is the focus; in the latter, the world is the focus.

In these new promises the people of the world can determine the nature with their relationship with God in accordance with their relationship with Abraham. To emphasize this, those who bless are spoken of in the plural, but the one who curses is spoken of in the singular (Gen. 12:3). Though this could be merely a stylistic feature to stress that the promises of this verse relate to whole groups as well as to individuals, it may also indicate God's preference to bless rather than to curse.⁴⁵ In any case, nations as well as individual people can be blessed or cursed by

God depending on whether they choose to bless or despise Abraham.

To bless Abraham means to recognize his relationship with God as one blessed by him. Delitzsch comments that blessing Abraham implies acknowledging the source of the blessing with a desire to participate in it. He says:

*Abram becomes a mediator of blessing for those in the neighbourhood, in that they, while acknowledging him as blessed of God, are themselves blessed, and for those remote in time or place, in that the report of Abram's blessing impels them to desire to share it.*⁴⁶

To curse Abraham means 'to despise', or 'to lightly esteem'. The Arabic cognate has the meaning of 'to make small', i.e., 'to treat with low respect'. B. Jacob comments that to despise Abraham means in effect to reject the very God who favoured him. Jacob states, 'A person who curses Abraham, the man blessed by God, is an enemy of God and will come to know through his own experiences the true source of blessing and curse.'⁴⁷

The final promise to Abraham comes as a climax to the passage. It is that in Abraham all the families of the earth 'will be blessed'. The verse can also be translated with 'will bless themselves'. This is because the verb of the *niphal* stem, which allows for either the passive or the reflexive idea. The passive idea stresses that Abraham is the channel of blessing. The reflexive idea stresses not only that Abraham is the channel, but it further emphasizes the responsibility of the people of the earth to respond positively to Abraham in order to share the blessings. Both meanings can be intended here for two reasons. First, both the passive and the reflexive meanings are in accord with the context and emphasis of the passage. Second, the same promise is given later to Abraham and to Isaac (Gen. 22:18; 26:4), and in both these cases the *hithpael* is used, which may be translated with a reflexive or a passive meaning. In Abraham all the nations of the world will find the example of

a life blessed by God, as well as the medium for being blessed likewise by the same God. This promise is unique to Abraham and his descendants, but ultimately points to the spiritual blessing of salvation through Christ who is the descendant of Abraham. This is precisely the New Testament teaching:

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations shall be blessed in you.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer . . . in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith . . . Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds', as referring to many, but rather to one, 'and to your seed', that is, Christ (Gal. 3:8, 9, 14, 16).

Genesis 12:1-3 reveals the missionary heart of God. The ultimate concern of God is directed at the whole world and not only at the one nation. It is only as this one chosen nation lives up to the conditions set by God that it can rightfully claim the fulfilment of the promises intended by him. The purposes of God are summed up in global blessing through the obedience of the seed of Abraham.

Second, Conditions in the Development of the Call of Abraham

The proposition of this section is that the promises given to Abraham were of a developing nature. As Abraham continued to live by faith, God spoke to him, expanding and strengthening his promises. Each time a new version of the promise appeared it was after some act of obedience on Abraham's part. The Genesis narrative records five repetitions of the original promises, each repetition coming after a demonstration of obedient faith and godliness. This section attempts to demonstrate that just as surely as God wants to

fulfil his promises, he also expects the conditions of righteousness to be met.

After Abraham Had Travelled by Faith. After Abraham had obeyed the original call and travelled to Canaan, the Lord appeared to him and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land (Gen. 12:7).' This is the first time that God appears to Abraham, and it is the first time that Abraham can claim divine right to the land of Palestine.⁴⁸ This occurred because Abraham obeyed the first command to leave home and travel by faith.

After Abraham by Faith Separated from Lot. The next time the promises of God reappear to Abraham is after he had separated from Lot. The way that Abraham separated from his nephew demonstrates his faith that God still would give him the promises. He acted in peacefulness, forbearance, and unselfishness.⁴⁹ This time the promises are repeated with greater strength. After the separation from Lot God spoke to Abraham emphasizing the promise of the land, but this time added that this is to be perpetual, or forever. God also repeated the promise of descendants using the figure of the dust, i.e., his descendants would be as numerous as the dust (Gen.13:14-17).

After Abraham by Faith Rescued Lot. Chapter 14 of Genesis records how Abraham rescued Lot from the hands of the enemy kings. Abraham had to trust God for this victory. His faith is the basis for Melchizedek's following blessing on him (Gen.14:19, 20).⁵⁰ The chapter ends with another sign of Abraham's faith in his refusal to take anything from the king of Sodom that would make him a vassal of his. Abraham demonstrated his allegiance to the Lord, and as a result of his faith, the Lord spoke to him and again magnified his promises in a new and unique way. The Lord first promised to reward his faith, 'Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great (Gen. 15:1).' Secondly, the Lord promised him a son (Gen. 15: 2-4). Thirdly, the Lord promised him

again numerous descendants, but this time using the figure of the stars, i.e., his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of heaven (Gen. 15:5). Fourthly, the Lord declared Abraham righteous because of his faith (Gen. 15:6). Fifthly, the Lord for the first time made a covenant with Abraham in which he swore by himself to fulfil all his promises. He put the obligation for fulfilling the promises on Himself alone (Gen. 15:7-21). Sixthly, the Lord for the first time defined the boundaries of the land (Gen. 15:18-21).

After the Trial with the Birth of Ishmael. Although Ishmael was not the son promised to Abraham, God apparently did not hold it against him for taking Hagar to be his second wife. Abraham seemed to have acted presumptuously on the basis of culture. He first fulfilled Sarah's wishes in going into Hagar (Gen. 16:2, 3), and later fulfilled her wishes in allowing her to treat her maid the way she wanted (Gen. 16: 5, 6). Yet there is no sign that his faith in the promises of God had weakened. He honestly seemed to have been fully satisfied in letting Ishmael be the intended heir, and indeed thought it to be God's will. He had obvious attachment to the lad, as indicated by his prayer for him (Gen. 17:18), as well as his grief over the idea of his departure (Gen. 21:10, 11).

God knew Abraham's heart, and that is why, after the birth of Ishmael, the Lord could command Abraham to walk before him and to be whole (Gen. 17:1). These two commands parallel Genesis 12:1-2, and set the conditions for the promises that follow. These promises were still more magnified. In addition to repeating the promises of posterity and land, two new additions are given. First, the Lord promised Abraham a son from Sarah's womb (Gen. 17:16). He changed the name of Abraham from Abram ('exalted father') to Abraham (which sounds similar meaning 'the father of a multitude' Gen. 17: 5).⁵¹ He also changed the name of Sarah from Sarai (possibly 'my princess') to Sarah ('princess' Gen.

17:15). Second, the Lord promised Abraham that he will make him into kings and nations (Gen.17:6). This may refer partly to the later emergence of the Midianites (Gen. 25:2, 12), and kings of Edom and of Israel (36:31). However, the New Testament stresses the spiritual aspect of this promise, i.e., through faith in Christ, people of all nations will become spiritual children of Abraham (cf. Rom. 4:16, 17; Gal.3:8, 9, 16). These promises given to Abraham must have been indeed overwhelming. They represent a further development in the original promises given to him, indicating again their conditional nature.

After Abraham's Victory in the Trial with Isaac. The story of Abraham's obedience in being willing to offer Isaac for a sacrifice represents the epitome of faith. At the end of this trial God repeated the previous promises, and this time he added that he would fulfil them because Abraham was obedient. God twice referred to Abraham's obedience as the basis for repeating the promises (Gen. 22: 16-17). Just as the fulfilment of the promises is certain for Abraham and his descendants, so his, as well as his descendants', obedience is demanded.

It is seen that as Abraham continued to walk uprightly, God continued to unfold his promises to him. Again, Abraham's obedience to God did not make the promises certain for his descendants, but only made it possible for his descendants to receive them.

Third, the Conditional Aspects of the Mosaic Covenant

The Mosaic Covenant comes after the Abrahamic Covenant in the form of a Suzerain-vassal treaty (Exod. 20-31; Deut. 1-32). The conditionality of this covenant is obvious, promising blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. This hinges on the conditional 'if', which is prevalent in the terminology of this covenant (in Deut. 4:25 and Deut. 28:1 beginning the section on the blessings, and in Deut.

28:15 beginning the section on the cursings). The book of Deuteronomy, in which God's relation with Israel is recapitulated, while it recognizes that the ultimate curse of the people can only be solved through YHWH, yet establishes the people as responsible to enjoy his continued blessing. The final book of the Pentateuch presents Moses just before his death and the transfer of his leadership, whereby he reviewed Israel's history, exhorting the people to renew their commitment to YHWH by challenging them to obey the stipulations of the covenant which required total allegiance as an expression of love for him, and obedience in daily experience. Accordingly, God's relation with Israel requires national and individual responsibility for continual enjoyment of blessings in the land.

Fourth, Conditions Reflected in the History of Israel

The history of Israel clearly demonstrates the conditional nature of God's relation to Israel. Its history is an application of the Mosaic Covenant. It demonstrates that God was willing to fulfil his promises to a particular generation of Israelites only when certain conditions were met. God often used other nations who were not in right standing before God to discipline Israel. He was constantly in the process of refining the nation, not only to bless her, but also to allow her to be a channel of blessing to the nations around her. At times God blessed the nation in spite of disobedience. He would do so according to some special purpose he had. But the general experience of the chosen was that God demanded his people's full obedience for full blessing. This was evident through their history in the wilderness, during the conquest, during the period of the Judges, and during the monarchy, both pre-exilic and post-exilic. The promises were Israel's to enjoy chiefly when she was spiritually ready to accept them.

The Unconditional Elements in the Promises to Israel

Along with, and in spite of, the presence of conditional elements, the unconditionality of God's promises to the nation Israel of a land, a posterity, and a blessing is also clearly evidenced. This is seen in three main ways: first, in the Abrahamic Covenant; second, in the Davidic Covenant; third, in the New Covenant.

First, Unconditional Elements Present in the Abrahamic Covenant

Noting again the difference between the promises given to Abraham and the covenant made with Abraham, it will be seen that the Abrahamic Covenant was unconditional. The establishment of this covenant is found in Genesis 15:1-21. That it is unconditional is indicated by several main factors.

First, the Abrahamic Covenant was unilateral. Through a divinely-ordered ritual God promised by himself to fulfil his part of the covenant (Gen. 15:7-21). It was only God who passed between the cut parts. Abraham did not. This suggests that the fulfilment of the covenant depended on God and not on Abraham or his seed.

Second, the unconditional aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant is confirmed by the New Testament (cf. Heb. 6:13-18).

Third, the Abrahamic Covenant, as well as other covenants with Israel, is called eternal (Gen. 17: 7, 13, 19). The Davidic Covenant (II Sam. 7: 13, 16, 19; I Chron. 17:12; 22: 10; Isa. 55:3; Ezek. 37:25) as well as the New Covenant (Isa. 61:8; Jer. 32:40; 50:5; Heb. 13:20) have been described in the same terms.

Fourth, the covenant is made with no conditions whatsoever.

Fifth, the land of the covenant was made to the seed of Abraham (Gen. 15: 18). This seed was further defined and narrowed to the line of Isaac (Gen. 26: 3-4) and then Jacob (Gen. 28:12-13).

No conditions were made then. Near his death, Joseph told his brothers, 'God will surely take care of you, and bring you up from this land to the land which he promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob' (Gen. 50: 24). On this formula, 'Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob', Townsend comments:

This formula was adopted or adapted in numerous references to the land as given to 'Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel)', to 'the (fore)fathers', or to 'Israel' indicating Jacob's line (cf. Exod. 6:4, 8; 13: 5, 11; 32:13; 33:1; Num. 11:12; 14:23; 32:11; Deut. 1:8; 6:10, 18; 7:8; 34:4; Josh. 21:43; 'land of Israel', Ezek. 11: 17; 20:38). In each case the reference is to Abraham's physical descendants.⁵²

Sixth, the promise that Israel would continue to exist forever is repeated in a time of apostasy (Jer. 31:36).

Seventh, it is very important to note that the conditional nature of the Mosaic Covenant differs radically from the conditional nature of the Qur'anic covenants. This is evident in five main ways. First, the conditional Mosaic Covenant comes *after* the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant and *before* the unconditional Davidic and New Covenants. The Qur'an does not speak of the Abrahamic, Davidic or New Covenants. Second, in giving the Mosaic Covenant, God showed to Moses the need for a regenerated heart to enable the individual and the nation to obey his precepts (cf. Deut. 10:16; 29:4; 30:6). This was fulfilled in the New Covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31ff. and New Testament fulfilment in the church). The Qur'an knows no such bestowal of grace. Third, the Mosaic Covenant is a revelation of the nature and holiness of God, whereas the Qur'anic covenants are a declaration of the will and power of God. Fourth, the Mosaic Covenant seeks to establish a relationship between man and God, whereas the Qur'anic covenants seek slave-submission of man to God. Fifth, blessing is assured in the first case but not guaranteed in the second.

The following table summarizes these differences:

Qur'anic Covenants	Mosaic Covenant
No unconditional covenant present	Before and after the unconditional covenants
Grace absent	Immersed in grace
Declares God's will and power	Reveals God's nature and holiness of God
Seeks servitude	Seeks a relationship
Blessing not assured	Blessing assured

Second, Unconditional Elements Present in the Davidic Covenant

Just as the Abrahamic Covenant is unconditional so is the Davidic (II Sam. 7:12-16). The unconditionality of this covenant is reflected in that it confirms to the nation the permanence of the seed promised to Abraham. This seed is to always occupy the throne of David. The Davidic king, being called 'anointed' to the throne anticipates 'the anointed': the Christ who will sit on it to provide complete fulfilment of God's promises to Israel. Furthermore, the unconditional element is clear from the use of the word 'eternal' (repeated three times in 7:13, 16), pointing to the perpetual nature of this promise. The unconditionality of the Davidic Covenant is further emphasized in the words of the angel to Mary, promising that her Son will sit on this throne forever (Luke 1:32-33). Luke later traced back the genealogy of Christ back to David (Luke 3:31). This promise to Mary comes after generations of apostasy on the part of Israel.

Third, Unconditional Elements Present in the New Covenant

Pentecost summarizes well the unconditionality of the New Covenant:

(1) *It is called eternal in Isaiah 24:5; 61:8; Jeremiah 31:36, 40; 32:40; 50:5.* (2) *This covenant is a gracious covenant that depends entirely upon the 'I will' of God for its fulfilment, Jeremiah 31:33. It does not depend upon man.* (3) *This covenant amplifies the third great area of the original Abrahamic covenant,*

*the area of 'blessing'. Inasmuch as this is only an amplification of the original Abrahamic covenant, which has been shown to be unconditional and literal, this covenant must be also. (4) This covenant is largely occupied with the question of salvation from sin and the impartation of a new heart. Salvation is solely the work of God. Thus the covenant that guarantees salvation to the nation Israel must be apart from all human agency and therefore unconditional.*⁵³

The twelve Jewish apostles of Christ were the channel of this blessing to the Gentile world. Though the spiritual aspects of the New Covenant have been fulfilled in the church, its full realization awaits its fulfilment to a remnant nation of Israel as an expression of God's faithfulness to his covenant (Ezek. 37:26-28).

A Harmony of the Conditional and the Unconditional Elements

It is of utmost importance to keep a balance between the conditional and the unconditional aspects of God's promises to Israel. Both dimensions need to be seen in right relation to one another. The following are several suggestions as to how to harmonize the two.

The Unconditional Elements

First, the nation Israel will definitely experience the ultimate fulfilment of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants in the future kingdom on earth. There Israel will serve as a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19:6), and will be an example and a channel of blessings to the nations of the whole earth.

Second, the unconditional elements ultimately relate to the eschaton. Each generation of Israelites is confronted with these elements as an eschatological actuality.

The Conditional Elements

First, the conditional elements serve to make participation in the unconditional elements a historical possibility. Participation is conditioned on obedience.

Second, the conditional elements only act as means by which each individual Israelite, as well as any generation of Israel (which would constitute the nation at any particular time in history) may participate in God's eschatological promises. In other words, they are means through which any generation of Israel could realize that promise of blessing in their own day. The unconditional elements speaking of everlasting blessing would confront each generation (of faith) as a future certainty.

Third, the conditions to be met do not determine whether some promises are fulfilled, but *when* they are fulfilled, and *who* will participate in them.

Even older Classic Dispensationalists agree on this point. Pentecost expresses the above by saying that the reception of the blessings of the covenant is dependent on the receptivity of the party to whom the covenant is made, without changing the everlasting character of the covenant. He states:

*To safeguard thinking on this point, it should be observed that an unconditional covenant, which binds the one making the covenant to a certain course of action, may have blessings attached to that covenant that are conditioned upon the response of the recipient of the covenant, which blessings grow out of the original covenant, but these conditioned blessings do not change the unconditional character to that covenant.*⁵⁴

John F. Walvoord expresses the same thought thus:

All agree that the individual enjoyment of blessing under the covenant is to a

large degree dependent upon the individual's faith and obedience. This is quite different than stating that the fulfilment of the covenant as a whole is conditioned upon obedience of the nation as a whole.⁵⁵

Fourth, obedience to certain conditions set by God demonstrates faith, not as a merit to inherit the promises, but as a readiness to receive them. To say that the experience of a promise is conditional is not to deny God's loyalty but rather to declare the importance of a ready heart to receive it.

Fifth, no generation of Israelites can claim to be the eschatological Israel. Only God determines that. The sole responsibility of each generation of Israelites is to respond to God in faith and obedience in order to participate in the promises in their time.

The Duty of Christians Today Towards Present Israel

The key to the present Arab-Israeli conflict is to maintain a balance between the conditional and unconditional aspects in God's relationship to Israel. It is hoped the following suggestions reflect a healthy and biblical balance regarding the duty of Christians towards present-day Israel.

The Responsibility of Western Christians

First, in speaking about Israel as the chosen people, Western Christians should stress that the promise of the land to the Jews is in accordance with the loyal love of God. The Jews do not deserve the land, it is a gift based on no merit but the grace of God alone. It belongs to God. Jews are residing aliens (Lev. 25:23) as Abraham was.

Second, the Christian message should emphasize the *Chooser* rather than the chosen, His *grace* rather than their privilege.

Third, Western Christians must be careful not to project what millennial Israel would be like onto the present Israel. This would be an unholy equa-

tion. Western Christians in backing policies to support Israel may be depriving Israel from depending on God rather than depending on the US.

Fourth, Western Christians should be careful not to ignore the conditional elements of God's relationship with Israel. Ignoring these conditional elements communicates wrongly that the God of the Bible is unjust and unloving. It must be emphasized that every generation of Israelites have the responsibility to walk in obedience. While Western Christians should not be anti-Semitic, they also must be anti-sin. Stanley Ellisen, a dispensational premillennialist professor who has spent his career studying the Palestinian issue, concludes that, in spite of the remarkable achievements of the Jewish people, and any human or international rights to the land, 'she falls far short of her covenant obligations. To put it bluntly, she has no biblical right to the covenant land.'⁵⁶

Fifth, Western Christians must direct Israel towards kind treatment of aliens (Exod. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:34) granting them the same privileges of Sabbath rest, festivals, social welfare, and legal rights. Ultimately, Western Christianity must show Israel that her purpose is to bring blessing to non-Israelites.

In looking at the political situation in the Middle East, since neither Jew nor Arab today are 'in Christ' (as nations), the best recourse to follow is one of equity and justice. All efforts must be pointed at achieving peace in the Middle East, taking into consideration the human rights of each party. As such, it is not enough to only consider the sufferings and rights of the Jewish people, but also the sufferings and rights of the Arab Palestinians.

Sixth, it is to be remembered that, though the Bible indicates that the Jews would return to the land of Palestine in unbelief, the present state of Israel does not constitute 'the regathering' of the nation. The prophesied regathering will occur when Israel is walking by faith, and is regathered

by Christ (Matt. 24:31), rather than by political might and human power.

The Responsibility of Arab Christians

First, Arab Christians must be careful not to ignore the unconditional elements in God's relationship with Israel. Doing so would communicate that the God of the Bible is unfaithful and ungracious. Arab Christians must consider the Jews as beloved for the sake of the ancestors (Rom. 11:28-29).

Second, Arab believers must put away all political bias, and must recognize that God shall fulfil his covenants. These covenants reflect His grace in past choosing, and his faithfulness in future fulfilment.

Third, Arab Christians must remember that the God of the Bible is unlike the portrayal of God in the Qur'an. They should be careful not to conceive of God as having no room to act in grace. They should remember that if God will not fulfil his promises to the nation, neither is he obliged to fulfil his promises to the Christian. Assurance of fulfilment in the former guarantees assurance of fulfilment in the latter.

Fourth, if Arab Christians claim, as they indeed do, a commitment to the inerrancy and infallibility of the Word of God, then this position naturally applies to the entire Word of God, both the Old Testament and the New. Because both portions of Scripture are equally inspired by God, we therefore teach the entire Bible. In teaching the Bible, it is impossible to sidestep the multitude of references to Israel. Studying the biblical verses that speak of Israel is no different than studying the Qur'anic verses that speak of Israel (cf. Qur'anic surahs Al-A'raf 7:159-160; Al-Alisra' 17:2, 4-7; Al-Maida 5:13-14, 22-29, 122; Al-Baqara 2:40, 47; Al-Jathiah 45:16-17a; Al-Tah 20:80).

Fifth, Arab Christians must know that the premillennial view of Scripture does not necessarily nor logically lead one to be pro-Zionist or supportive

of any effort to rebuild a Jewish temple. In all cases, the only solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is that which is based on equity and justice. All effort must be exerted to help establish peace between all parties at the personal, familial and social levels. However, reaching true and lasting peace ultimately takes place through the experience of peace in the individual heart through a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Endnotes

¹Robert Clouse, *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 211-12. It is to be noted that Clouse's eschatological position, at least as presented in this book, is not clear.

²Louis Bahjat Hamada, *God Loves the Arabs Too* (Nashville: Winston-Derek Publishers, 1986), 85-107.

³Eugene H. Merrill, review of *God Loves the Arabs Too*, by Louis Bahjat Hamada, in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October-December 1987, p. 474.

⁴This statement was given by Hanan Mikhail Ashrawi, the Arts dean at Bir Zeit University on US national TV on 'Nightline' April 26, 1988.

⁵Cf. Imad N. Shehadeh, 'Ishmael in Relation to the Promises to Abraham,' Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, May 1986.

⁶Much of the information here came from 'This Week' in the Holy Land: Part 3, a transcript from 'Nightline' of ABC NEWS, April 27, 1988. This source proves to be object, presenting both views fairly.

⁷Ibid., 2.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., 3.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., 4.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., 4-5.

¹⁷Ibid., 5.

¹⁸Ibid., 8.

¹⁹Ibid., 9.

²⁰For further treatment, see Imad N. Shehadeh, 'A Comparison and a Contrast between the Prologue of John's Gospel and

Qur'anic Surah 5' (Th.D. Dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1990).

²¹Sura Al-A'araaf 7:159-160 (cf. Al-Alisraa' 17:2).

²²Sura Al-Maida 5:22 (cf. v. 122).

²³Sura Al-Baqara 2:47.

²⁴Sura Al-jathiah 45:16-17a.

²⁵Sura Al-Maida 5:23-29.

²⁶Sura Al-Israa' 17:4-7 (cf. Abdallah Yousef Ali, *The Glorious Kur'an*, n. 2174, p. 694).

²⁷Sura Al-Tah 20:80.

²⁸Sura Al-Baqara 2:40.

It is to be noted that the qur'anic Arabic language uses three words for covenant. They are mithaq, 'wa'd', and 'ahd'.

²⁹Sura Al-Maida 5:13-14.

³⁰In Sura Al-Maida 5:67 it declares that 'God does not love those that do mischief.'

³¹Sura Al-jathiah 45: 16-17 (cf. Al-Maida 5:67).

³²Sura Al-Baqara 2:62.

³³Sura Al-Maida 5:15.

³⁴Sura Al-Maida 5:20.

³⁵For an earlier treatment of this subject, see Imad Shehadeh, 'Ishmael in Relation to the Promises to Abraham' (Th.M. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1986).

³⁶Cf. Imad N. Shehadeh, 'Ishmael in Relation to the Promises to Abraham,' Th.M. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, May 1986.

³⁷Cf. Allen P. Ross, 'Genesis' in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (eds) (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985), 47.

³⁸Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, 2 vols (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961, 1964), 2:310-11.

³⁹Ibid., 2:313.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* by Joseph Scharbert, 2:294.

⁴²*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. 'Blessing,' by H. G. Link, 1:208.

⁴³Cassuto, 2:313.

⁴⁴Cf. Cassuto, 2:314.

⁴⁵Delitzsch maintains that the change in number indicates that the curse belongs only to individuals who isolate themselves from the channel of blessing. However, this idea does not stand because the parallel promise to Jacob and to the nation is spoken of in the plural (Gen. 27:29; Num. 24:9). See Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis*, 2 vols. (Trans. Sophia Taylor. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1899; reprint ed., Minneapolis, Minnesota: Klock and Klock Christian

Publishers, 1978), 1:379.

⁴⁶Ibid., 1:378.

⁴⁷B. Jacob, *Das Erste Book der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin, 1934), 86.

⁴⁸Cf. Delitzsch, 1:382.

⁴⁹Cf. Jacob, 92.

⁵⁰Cf. Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, 121.

⁵¹Ross, 58.

⁵²Jeffrey L. Townsend, 'Fulfillment of the Land Promise in the Old Testament', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 (October-December 1985): 322.

⁵³J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 118-119.

⁵⁴Ibid., 68.

⁵⁵John F. Walvoord, 'Premillennialism and the Abrahamic Covenant,' *Bibliotheca Sacra* 109 (January, 1952): 37-46.

⁵⁶Stanley Ellisen, *Who Owns the Land?* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1991), 186.

False Teaching and its Consequences

A sermon by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

'But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.' 2 Peter 2:1-3

This chapter deals, as we are reminded by the third verse, with the whole subject of the havoc wrought in the Christian church by false teaching concerning the nature of the Gospel. I am ready to admit that I approach this chapter once more with a good deal of disinclination. It is, as I think all must agree, one of the most terrible and terrifying chapters in the entire Bible. Anyone who enjoys reading a chapter like this must surely be abnormal. It is a chapter which has much in it that is unsavoury and unpleasant; and I say, left to one's own choice, and one's own likes and dislikes, this is the kind of chapter that one would avoid. I say that in order that we may remind one another in passing of the importance of taking the whole Bible, and the importance of being systematic in our reading and studying of the Bible. Anyone who does not follow a system of Bible reading which takes one through the whole Bible is certain never to read a chapter like this. People who only read their so-called favourite chapters, and who pick out the sections that they like and which help them, would never spend much time on this second chapter of the second Epistle of Peter. And yet we must remember that

if we believe at all in the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, this chapter is as inspired as is the eighth of Romans or the third of John, or any one of our favourite Psalms. It is the Word of God, and we are to take and consider the whole Word of God. We must take those parts which do not appeal to our natural man and realise that they have their lessons for us which are as definite and as certain as those other parts which make a greater natural appeal to us. I say, therefore, that this chapter has to be faced; and this is perhaps another justification for expository teaching – preaching which is concerned to expound the Word of God and not merely to express the ideas of the preacher, preaching which is not merely topical and intended to suit the popular palate and conditions prevailing at the moment. This shows us the importance of a systematic consideration of the Word of God and its message.

Now here, I say, we are driven to this because of the very fact that Peter ever wrote the chapter and wrote it at such length. He seemed to be concerned to make his point so clear that he elaborated it and gave all these grim and unsavoury details in describing the kind of person whom he is consider-

ing. Peter felt that this subject was of such vital importance that he could not possibly take anything for granted. You will remember that the Epistle of Jude bears a very striking resemblance to this chapter. There are certain verses which are almost identical, and the authorities have debated throughout the centuries as to which was dependent upon the other. That really does not matter – the point is that both realised the importance of the subject. You will find similar warnings and exhortations in the other Epistles, and in the Book of Revelation in particular. You will find it also in the first Epistle of John. The Apostles were tremendously concerned about this matter, and they left nothing undone in their endeavour to warn these first Christians about preserving the purity of the faith and 'contending for the faith that had once and for ever been committed to them' – to defend it and to make certain that it should never become adulterated. That is the theme.

There is nothing that is more important at the present time than for us to consider again very carefully everything that the Apostle has to say here. I hinted in the previous chapter that it would surely be very difficult to find a

more accurate and perfect description in detail of the world as it is today, and of the church in the world, than that which you find in this very chapter. Personally I know of no more perfect summary of the last hundred years than what you find here. Here is a picture, in other words, of a world steeped in godlessness, immorality, vice, looseness and lawlessness. That is the picture. You see here the kind of moral conditions prevailing in the history of the world at the time of the flood, in Sodom and Gomorrah, at the time when our Lord came into this world, and subsequently in the so called Dark Ages. Does it not seem evident and obvious that we are descending into such a condition at the present time if we have not already made the descent? Look at the world around and about us. Look at its apostasy from God, its living to the flesh and that which is foul and ugly, and, especially, all the lawlessness that is characterising the life of mankind at this present time. Here is the church, hesitant, doubtful, seemingly uncertain of her own word and message, afraid, concerned about herself and her own future as an organisation, and yet apparently impotent as she faces this world – impotent in the sense of having no message of condemnation and no call to repentance and a return to God in Christ. Now that is the situation.

It seems to me that we have outlined here the very condition in which we find ourselves at this present time. Put quite simply and bluntly, you and I, my friends, find ourselves living in one of the really difficult periods, indeed in one of the most difficult periods in the whole history of the church. Contrast our position today with that of our fathers, even going back twenty to thirty years: contrast it with those who lived sixty or seventy years ago. Then the whole life of the country was different; Christianity and religion were in a sense popular; men and women gathered together in the House of God and Christian teaching influenced the whole life of the nation and even the

If we are to do what God would have us do, we must set truth ever in the first position.

life of Parliaments. Then the Gospel of Christ really did count, and was at any rate respected even by those who did not practise it. But we no longer live in such a day and period. The masses have turned their backs upon the Gospel and we find ourselves a comparatively small remnant facing such a world. Now that is the situation. It is a time of exceptional difficulty. It is not an easy thing to be a Christian today. It never has been, but it is unusually difficult at a time like this. And perhaps the difficulty that presents itself to us above every other difficulty is that of having to make a stand, even within the church herself, for that which we believe to be the real and true Gospel. It becomes difficult for this reason. The whole tendency at the present time is for men to speak in this way. 'Here', they say, 'is your world as you have described it. Christian people have become a small company. Now surely the one thing that matters above everything else at a time like this is that we should all stand together.'

I have referred to the Ecumenical Movement, this idea of a great world church. The argument for it is that because we are small in number we must sink all individual differences and distinctions and preferences. It is a time, we are told, when we should close the ranks, when we should avoid being over-punctilious, when we should avoid especially the tendency to insist that everyone should dot his i's and cross his t's exactly as we do. We are told that we should not be arguing about differences in teaching and doctrine. 'Let all who claim the name of Chris-

tian, however vaguely, stand together and present a united front' – that is the argument that one hears so constantly. In such a situation it is not easy to contend for the faith, it is not an easy thing to fight for that which you believe to be the Gospel and which alone you believe to be the Gospel. It is a very difficult thing at such a time to stand for truth, and to say that truth matters even more than unity, and that over and above this question of numbers and a common stand, is the purity of the faith and an honest declaration of the Word of God as we are given to see it.

Now that is in a sense the very problem with which Peter deals here. His whole argument is to the effect that, if we are to do what God would have us do, we must set truth ever in the first position, and that even though we may be reduced to a handful we must still contend for the faith. For our one and only concern must be for 'the truth once and for ever delivered to the saints'. Here he tells us how that is to be done. He gives us great encouragement. Thank God for it, but before we can go on to that encouragement we must again return to Peter's own analysis of this false teaching – the false teaching in the Old Testament times and the false teaching of the new era. The first thing we have to do is to recognise the true and the false. We considered that in general in the preceding chapter, but I want to consider it further and in greater detail now. I say once more that I would prefer to teach the Gospel in a more positive manner. But it is not for the preacher to choose his text. It is for him to expound the Word of God; and as Peter goes on reiterating these statements, it is our business, if we are to be honest expositors, to follow in his footsteps.

According to Peter, the first thing we have to determine and realise, is *the cause of this condition*. What is it that leads to the world becoming so immoral and godless and foul? What is it that leads to this even within the church herself at times? What is it in other words, that leads to a godless

world and to apostasy in the church? Why is the world as it is? Why is the church as she is today? What is the matter? Why is there this lack of life and power and vigour in the Christian church as she faces the world today? Well, according to the Apostle, the answer is that it is always due to false teaching. The cause of the trouble is invariably a failure to conform to the law and the testimony and the teaching of God. Now that, according to Peter, is not a matter to be deduced; it is a fact. And he proves it by producing evidence from history. You remember his evidence. He takes first of all the case of the Flood. You remember the descriptions that are given of the world immediately before the Flood – the godlessness and the licence, the utter moral confusion. Go back to the Book of Genesis and read the account of that world, for yourself. The world was so full of terrible things that God destroyed it by the Flood – God judged and condemned it. But the question is, What was it that brought the world into such a state? What was it that led to such a condition? There is only one answer to the question; mankind had departed and had fallen away from God and from his teaching. God had told man how he was to live. God had always given man a law, but men had flouted the law of God, men had turned their backs upon God, men had laughed at the name and thought and suggestion of God. It was because they had turned their backs upon God and were living according to their own ideas that the world ever entered into that state which produced the Flood by way of judgment. Apostasy from God and consequent lawlessness were the causes that led to the Flood.

Then Peter hurried on to his second instance and illustration. I need not remind you of the unsavoury details in connection with the Cities of the Plain. Read chapters 18 and 19 of the Book of Genesis and you will find all about them – the terrible moral pollution, the ugliness and the foulness of the life of those cities. Yes, but I ask again,

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What was the cause of it? And again the answer is exactly the same. These were people who had turned their backs upon God; they had forsaken the teaching, they had given up the way of the law and were living according to their own desires and lusts. Still the same answer! Or take any other period of moral degradation in the history of the Children of Israel and you will always find it is the same explanation. Whenever they turn from God and His teaching, they always sink morally to the very dregs and to the very depths. And if you take the story of the early church you will find the same sequence there. As soon as they began to depart from the pure Gospel of Christ it showed itself in their moral living and in their daily life. And as you take the subsequent history of the church you will always find exactly the same thing.

What of our age and generation? Can anyone dispute that this is still the same? There is only one explanation of the state of society in this country today, and the state of the whole world, and it is that mankind during the last hundred years has been turning its back upon God. Whether we like it or not, it is an invariable rule. It always follows, as the night follows the day; when men cease to worship God and to live by this Book and to believe the Gospel of Christ, down goes morality and everything good with it. Though you may have the best education system the world has ever known, though you may have passed Acts of Parliament designed to deal with moral and social conditions, though you may have

catered for every eventuality, when God is forgotten, you immediately return to a condition such as obtained at the time of the Flood and in Sodom and Gomorrah, and which obtains largely even at this time. Whether we like it or not, that is the solid and solemn fact. It is the turning away from the pure doctrine that ultimately leads to moral, political, social and economic chaos.

But it is interesting to observe how this process of decline and of degradation generally takes place in stages. That is where this whole teaching is so important, because of the subtlety of the process. It never happens suddenly. You never get the result following immediately after men and women have started turning away from God. There are always steps and stages. That notable professor of theology, Emil Brunner of Switzerland, has I think, put this in a perfect way when he says that there are generally three stages. The grandfather believed the Gospel and he lived a life that was in conformity with that teaching. The son ceased to believe the Gospel but he still conducted his life according to the ideas of morality that were given to him by his father. The third generation ceases to believe not only in the Gospel but also in the moral and ethical view of life based upon and derived from the Gospel. By today you and I are surrounded by the grandchildren of the Victorian grandfathers; and by today we have found that morality cannot exist apart from the Gospel. The very category of morality is being denied today. But the deterioration takes time to take effect.

Then surely another very interesting point about this whole question is *the relationship between false teaching and loose living*. From the standpoint of mere mechanics it is very difficult at times to see which of the two comes first. False teaching always leads to false living; yes, but false living always tends to produce false teaching. Let me put it like this. We are told here by Peter in prophecy that 'many' shall follow their pernicious or 'lascivious' ways. Why is it that the many are always so

ready to listen to false teaching? What has made man during the last hundred years so ready to believe the theory put forward by Charles Darwin as though it were a solemn fact? Why is man so ready to read articles or reports of sermons in which someone has denied the miraculous and the supernatural? Why is it that the many are always ready to follow various false teachings? Surely there is only one adequate answer to that question. It is because the false teaching makes it easier for them to live the kind of life they want to live. It is because, if they can get rid of God and the miracles and the supernatural, they will be able to live the life they want to live without being condemned by their conscience. It is, in a sense, the immoral life that calls for wrong teaching. There is a strange inter-action between these things – it is the apostate state of man that always encourages false teaching. The false teaching, in other words, panders to man as he is fallen from God; and man welcomes the teaching because it excuses the life that he lives.

We must not believe everything we hear, we must examine it by the Word of God.

There then we see the cause of the condition; and unless we are aware of the fact that it is this falling away from God that accounts for our world as it is today, we have not even begun to understand the modern situation. Now having seen that, let us go on.

How is all this to be avoided? Here Peter gives us very detailed instructions. The thing we have to do is to realise the character of false teaching. We must examine it, we must sift it, and investigate it, and this is the thing that so many find difficult. It is not an easy thing for a man to be different from others, it is not an easy thing to stand on your own against the vast majority of people. Man by instinct and by nature does not like to be the

odd man out. It is very much easier to go with the crowd, and to conform to all that is popular. But that is the very thing against which the Bible warns us. We may have to be like Noah, standing alone and having the whole world laughing at us. We may have to be like Lot in Sodom. We may have to stand as some of those first Christians had to stand. We may have to stand as some of the Protestant Fathers had to stand; we may even have the church condemning us. No, it is not easy, and yet it is the very thing which we are exhorted to do. We must not believe everything we hear, we must examine it by the Word of God. We must be contenders for the faith; not that we appoint ourselves as spiritual detectives, but that we realise the importance of standing for the truth. How can we do this? How can we recognise that which is false? Here are some details that fill out the principles already laid down.

Here are some of the general points

It is right to observe that false teaching is always subtle. Peter puts it like this – ‘There were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies.’ That word ‘privily’ is very important – that is how he emphasises the subtlety of it. Now as we go into these details it is important that we should bear in mind what has been happening during the last hundred years. The subtlety of the process is emphasised by the apostle. Do not expect, he says in effect, that the false teachers will suddenly stand among you and say, ‘I am a false teacher and I am going to say something that is entirely opposed to anything you have ever heard.’ On the contrary – ‘privily’ – in a very subtle manner. See, they will say, I am a preacher of the Gospel, I am one of you and I am going to preach the Gospel to you. They will even use the language of the Gospel but they will give a different meaning to it. That has been happening during the past century. Men have called Christ Saviour, but

they have meant by Saviour ‘a Great Example’. They have used the very terminology of the New Testament, but they have evacuated the meaning of the New Testament terms. That is where the whole danger comes in. The terms are still used and employed, but they confuse the meaning in this insinuating and subtle manner. The poison of error and heresy has been introduced – ‘privily’ – using the language but giving it a different meaning.

Another characteristic of this procedure is, according to Peter, that *it is irreverent*. Reference to this is made in verses 10 and 11 – ‘presumptuous’, ‘self-willed’. There he is describing partly the irreverent attitude of these false teachers towards the truth. Instead of preaching the Bible as the Word of God with reverence, instead of using this as a unique Book which in a sense a man must only preach with humility, instead of preaching the Person of the Lord as realising His unique Deity, these false teachers preach these things without a spirit of reverence. They deny that this is an entirely unique Book, and they do not hesitate to use human language with respect to It. They do not hesitate to dismiss and expurgate certain parts of it. They speak of our Lord as but a man. There is an absence of reverence, there is an absence of a godly approach. There is little of the respect and awe which these things deserve. ‘Irreverence’ says Peter. And again, let me remind you of the past hundred years and the story of the so-called higher criticism.

But not only that, the Apostle tells us that *this kind of teaching is dishonest* – ‘Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray.’ These false teachers are going to be dishonest, says Peter; and I am not exaggerating when I suggest that this very prophecy of Peter has often been fulfilled during the last hundred years. There have been men who have taken ordination vows in which they have said they believe this to be the Word of God, and the unique Word of God, and have then proceeded to say it is not the Word of God. They

have sometimes promised under oath and vow that they will not engage in certain practices that had been condemned by their own church, and they then proceed to do those very things. Can such conduct be described in any language save that of dishonesty?

Those are some of the general characteristics of the false prophets and false teaching.

But let me go on to a more particular question, to a more detailed analysis of the teaching itself. What are the characteristics of the teaching? Well, according to Peter, *it always takes a superficial view of sin and evil*. To go back again to verses 10 and 11, 'presumptuous are they, self-willed', 'they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities'. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring no railing accusation against them before the Lord.' Now what does it mean to speak evil of dignities? There can be no doubt that he is referring to the way in which these teachers speak of evil powers, about the Devil and about the forces of hell and evil. He says that even the angels do not bring railing accusation against them, but these people do. Isn't it amazing to notice how accurately Scripture has prophesied what has happened. Have you observed the way in which men have joked about the Devil during the last hundred years? The Bible takes the Devil terribly seriously, but the Devil has become a joke in the last century. The Bible takes evil spirits and evil powers desperately seriously. 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.' But men today ridicule evil powers and spirits. The Devil has been dismissed, he is nothing but a joke – 'speaking evil of dignities'. Let us beware, my friends, lest we allow the world in its irreverence to influence us. False teachers always take an inadequate view of sin and evil; indeed for a hundred years or more men have not really believed in sin. They have recognised

certain laxities which they claim can be corrected by education and culture.

The other characteristic of the false teaching is that *it is empty* – see verses 17-19. 'These are wells without water'; in other words, the false teaching has no light, has no knowledge, has no real instruction. It does not give us any power, it therefore has no effect upon life. Let me put it in the form of a challenge. Think of all the books that have been written in the last century criticising the Bible. Think of the new theology of which we have heard so much – the new teaching that was going to correct these ancient myths and these mere magical beliefs, the new gospel that was going to be a social gospel, an ethical gospel, this marvellous new higher criticism of the Bible that was going to abstract the truth, and that was going to lead to such amazing results. Let us ask simply, What has it led to? What do we know about truth that our great-great-grandfathers did not know? How much better is our world? What has it really produced? Well, it is interesting to note that the latest scholarship with respect to the Old Testament is now telling us that we must no longer spend our whole time on criticism; we must now try to get at the ethical teaching and the message of the Old Testament. The very authorities themselves are now granting that the higher criticism has largely played itself out, and that we must get back to the message of the Bible. 'Wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest.' Think of the wells that men have been sinking in the last hundred years; look at names like Wellhausen and others and the marvels they were going to produce. They have led to nothing but a spiritual barrenness, and two world wars, 'wells without water, clouds carried with a tempest.' They never work – 'they promise liberty but they themselves are the servants of corruption'. They are but 'great swelling words of vanity' which lead to nothing whatsoever but corruption and despair.

So we are to avoid this false teaching – we are to recognise it for what it is

and avoid it. Why should we do so? 'Because', says Peter, it is 'damnable' – they are 'destructive heresies'. They have the elements of destruction within themselves, they destroy the very men who believe them, and they are going to lead to still more terrible destruction.

But perhaps the most vital reason of all why we should avoid such teaching is that it *brings the truth into disrepute*. Because of whom, says Peter, 'the way of truth shall be evil spoken of'. Alas and alack, that it has been so often men who have claimed the name of Christian who have undermined the belief of others in this very Book. Alas that it has so often been the church herself that has caused men not to accept it as the Word of God, but rather to believe in something which is merely social and human teaching. The truth has been brought into disrepute. The vast majority of men and women are outside the church today because they somehow have got the notion that the church herself does not believe in

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this Book, that the church herself is uncertain about the Gospel. That is why you and I must be careful to avoid such teaching, such heresy. Men and women of the world are looking at us, and, as the times may become darker, they will look at us increasingly. Let us make certain that we know the truth we believe, let us make certain we know Him whom we have believed. Let us make certain of the faith, so that when they come to us and ask for a word, we shall be able to give it without hesitation, knowing 'the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.'

Obituary of Ronald S. Wallace

D. F. Kelly, Professor of Systematic Theology at the Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina

Dr Ronald S. Wallace (born 16 April 1911, died 26 February 2006).

Ronald S. Wallace, a retired Church of Scotland minister, biblical and Calvin scholar, theological professor, and internationally respected author of both scholarly and popular Christian books, has died in Edinburgh, only a few weeks short of his ninety-fifth birthday. Dr. Wallace is as widely known in the churches and theological colleges of the United States as he is in those of Britain. Indeed, he is still a major theological and spiritual presence in many churches and Christian educational institutions far afield of Britain and North America, for he has taught in both Lebanon (during the height of its civil war in the middle 1980s) and several years later in Singapore (when he was in his eighties). His books were translated into many languages over the decades, including Korean, Albanian and Portuguese. He certainly gave away many of his royalties (for his books sold well, and thus were constantly reprinted) for the purpose of sending these – and other evangelical Christian literature – to poorly paid pastors in rural Africa and elsewhere. Such people were always on his heart and in his prayers. Although he was a profoundly erudite and discerning biblical scholar, as

well as a highly literate and massively informed interpreter of the thought of John Calvin, most of what he wrote was for pastors and Christian laity whom he considered to be front-line labourers, frequently under hardship and financial shortage, and ever in need of encouragement, which was one of the goals of his life to provide.

He was a graduate of Edinburgh University (MA in English and the Arts), and took his BD at New College, studying under H. R. Mackintosh, Professor Manson and others. Some years later in the midst of a busy ministry, he wrote what has remained the classical exposition of *Calvin's Doctrine of Word and Sacrament* (still in print), and for this achievement was awarded the PhD by Edinburgh University.

While a student at Edinburgh, he met Mary Torrance (also studying for her MA) at the Evangelical Alliance of Students. Mary was one (out of six) of the famous Torrance family, missionaries to China and then major figures in the theological life of the Church of Scotland. Along with Mary, Ronald became friends with her brothers, Thomas F. (later professor in Edinburgh, leading author, and Moderator of the Church of Scotland), James (later professor in Aberdeen and author), and David (well-known C of S parish

minister, scholar and author), as well as Mary's two sisters, both of whom married C of S ministers/missionaries.

Ronald married Mary Torrance, who had a first-rate theological mind herself (as did both of her parents). I remember her telling me that during the air raids in World War II, she was sitting in bomb shelters near Glasgow, reading Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. Whenever I visited in their home, we were discussing theology of every point of view: not just that of Calvin or Barth, but Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, radical German thought, conservative-evangelical British and American, etc. Ronald and Mary had over the years of their early parish ministry three children: David, Elizabeth and Heather, all of whom are married and have children, and have remained close to their parents.

Ronald served several C of S parishes: Crosshill in Ayrshire (1937-1940), Pollock in Glasgow (1940-1950), St Kentigerns, Lanark (1951-1960), and finally, Lothian Road Church in Edinburgh (1960-1964), from which he was called to be professor of theology at Columbia Theological Seminary in Georgia, a Southern Presbyterian institution. He taught there till his retirement in the late 1970s, when he and Mary returned to Edinburgh. Thus, large numbers of

American Presbyterian ministers came under his theological influence, while many of their wives were ministered to by Mary. Ties of deep affection were formed which have never been broken.

During World War II, Ronald temporarily left his parish to join the C of S 'huts and canteens' as a way of serving the British troops in European fields of battle. He was, thus in the early Allied group to enter Berlin, and had to wait until the Russians were allowed in first. Afterwards, he returned to Pollock Church in Glasgow, and in addition to a very diligent ministry, marked by hard study and effective, popular preaching (some of which later was turned into books that are still in print), as well as a heavy schedule of pastoral visitation, in which no one was missed, he along with his brother-in-law, Thomas F. Torrance and others, helped to bring into being the Scottish Church Theology Society, and the Scottish Journal of Theology, which have deeply marked the theological landscape in Britain and America ever since.

As noted above, much of his preaching was turned into widely-read books for both ministers and laity: *Gospel Miracles*, *Many Things in Parables*, *Elijah and Elisha*, and others. He also wrote *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, and continued his productive writing long after his retirement; really, until his early nineties. Among his later books were such as *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation*, and *Lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph*, and a volume on the Atonement, and others. Knowing Holy Scripture and the theological tradition so well, and having lived through such turbulent times with his eyes and heart open, he had a remarkable perception of how to diagnose our human problems, and then to apply gracious and transforming truth to it, always centred in the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Mary Torrance Wallace, his beloved soul-companion, died in 1988, and Ronald bore this great loss bravely, and continued to be productive in

ministry, especially as a writer. He remained devoted to his children and grandchildren, and often told me about them, and requested prayers to encourage them on their pilgrimage. He never ceased to be intensely interested in all that was happening in the worldwide church of all branches, and he kept in touch to the end, with people on many continents in this regard.

Ronald S. Wallace was very modest and unassuming; a quiet, but stalwart Christian presence in every company. It was his way to go to the back of the line in order to put others first. We know why he did it: he was a follower of the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world, and he wanted others to know him. Now he has passed through the valley of the shadow of death into the Father's house, and all is well.



Bob Fyall interviews Edward Lobb

It is more common for people to leave Scotland to live and work in England than the other way round. Thus it is a particular pleasure to welcome Edward Lobb who has been appointed as Director of the Cornhill Training Course.

Edward is married to Catherine who is a GP. They have four children: Henry (23); John (19); Harriet (9) and Emily (7). They live in a rambling old farmhouse near Beith in Ayrshire with Edward's mother and a flock of seventy plus chickens which Edward breeds and exhibits at shows.

Bob: Tell us about your background.

Edward: I was born into a nominally Christian family, and brought up in Radlett, Hertfordshire. My parents took me regularly to the local Anglican church, which was friendly but liberal; so it wasn't until I was away at boarding school, at Haileybury College, that I first heard the Gospel from evangelical Christians. Being immensely worldly, I found the Gospel immensely challenging. But I finally surrendered at the age of fifteen or sixteen and then grew slowly and unsteadily as a young believer. My early discipleship – as for so many of my contemporaries – was nurtured by a para-church organisation rather than by a local church. In my case, it was the fine leaders of the Scripture Union boys' camps at Iwerne Minster in Dorset who cajoled, taught, and challenged me to follow Christ; and in my early twenties I was able to take my first hesitant steps in leadership as a junior leader at Iwerne Minster. It was a wonderful training in personal work, leading group Bible studies and giving talks from the Bible to teenagers.

For many decades the Iwerne camps have supplied steady streams of evangelical ordinands into the Church of England, and I became one of

them, heading off to Wycliffe Hall in Oxford at the age of twenty-one.

Bob: How were you trained?

Edward: Wycliffe Hall in the 1970s, as it is today, was broadly speaking evangelical, and the training we received in Old and New Testaments, Christian doctrine and ethics was fundamentally sound. But we were not trained to be preachers. The assumption was that if we were taught the Bible, doctrine, ethics, church history and a little pastoral psychology we would have the raw materials to hand from which passable sermons might be made: but the syllabus did not include the skills of how to handle the Bible effectively in the pulpit. And when I began to hear the preaching of men like John Stott and Martyn Lloyd-Jones (whom I heard twice in the later years of his life), I realised that to preach in such a way as to cause the Bible to command the congregation's attention was work that required hard labour and concentration as well as a certain gifting.

My training continued with two curacies (assistant minister's posts) in the Manchester Diocese. During the second of these posts in 1981, I was invited to a small conference in Surrey

by Jonathan Fletcher (now of Wimbledon). I was one of about three dozen young ministers to be invited, and the purpose of the conference was 'for Dick Lucas to teach us how to expound the Bible, because we haven't got a clue how to do it'. I went eagerly to the conference, and it didn't take long for us to realise how clueless we were.

Dick taught us to *read* the Bible. He showed us that if we were ever to preach its message, we first had to hear it ourselves. And we couldn't hear it ourselves unless we learned to read the Bible properly. He taught us how essential it was to read a text in its context, for the context governs the meaning. He taught us to attend to the historical context of a passage as well as its literary context, and to see what the passage was saying to its original recipients before trying to apply it to ourselves. He taught us a great many other things which there isn't space to go into here. But we began to see that the Bible was grander, more wonderful and more powerful than we had imagined; that it was indeed the voice of God himself addressing and summoning the world to repentance and faith in Christ.

That little conference in 1981 proved to be the seed from which the Procla-

mation Trust later grew. Those of us who went to it were so bowled over by what we learned that, like baby birds, we clamoured for more. More conferences were organised; more people became keen to learn how to expound the Scriptures better; as the demand grew, the supply of conferences increased. Dick Lucas brought men like John Chapman and Phillip Jensen from Australia and Don Carson from America to help with the teaching. The Proclamation Trust was formed, largely Anglican at first but quickly embracing evangelicals from other denominations. The Cornhill Training Course, led by David Jackman, was started in 1991 and arose out of the Proclamation Trust's conviction that where the Bible is taught, God's voice is heard.

Bob: Why did you come to Scotland?

Edward: Catherine (my wife) and I have long loved Scotland, having visited the Highlands and Islands for holidays every year for at least the last twenty-five years. In 2002 I was unwell and having to take a long break from my vicar's post in Burton-on-Trent; and we went for a family holiday, with our four children, to the island of Barra. There we met the Church of Scotland minister, John Urquhart, and soon formed a close friendship with him and his wife and family. And from then we began to discover that Scotland, despite its fine Christian history, was in as poor a state as England as far as the strength and effectiveness of evangelical ministry was concerned.

By 2004 my health had recovered, but only after I had resigned my position as vicar of St Peter's, Stapenhill, Burton-on-Trent. Willie Philip had just been appointed as minister of St George's-Tron in Glasgow, having spent the previous five years as Director of Ministry at the Proclamation Trust's headquarters in London. Willie had long been dreaming of the possibilities of starting a Cornhill Training Centre in Scotland, having helped with the teaching of the London Cornhill

Training Course and having become convinced of the course's usefulness in training preachers in how to handle the Bible well and to communicate its message effectively. So he asked me if I would consider coming to Glasgow so as to set up a Cornhill Training Course and subsequently lead it.

Bob: How are preparations going for the Scottish Cornhill Training Course?

Edward: We moved to Glasgow in 2005, and are prayerfully planning to open our Scottish CTC in September 2006. At present (late March) we have four students enrolled for September, and hope that we might be able to start with about ten or twelve. Our prayer is that even if the course starts – and perhaps remains – small in numbers of students, it will nevertheless be a formative influence for those who join it. It is a one-year, full-time course of study: its focus is narrow, the Bible. We plan to study the principles of exposition, certain Bible books in detail, how the whole Bible fits together, how to teach the different genres of biblical literature – and all this in the context of prayer and fellowship and with plenty of practice in small groups where students present outlines of sermons, and full sermons, to be constructively criticised. Bob Fyall, Willie Philip and I will do the bulk of the teaching, helped by other visiting teachers and lecturers.

Bob: What is your longer-term vision for the Scottish CTC?

Edward: We are not setting up the training course in any way to rival or compete with other training ventures in Scotland. Indeed, we hope that some of the students who have been through the Cornhill Course may then go on to receive the fuller and broader training that other institutions are offering. Our aim is limited: it is to train preachers and Bible teachers to do effective work, and to develop a confidence in the Bible as the Word of God and the only essential resource

(along with prayer and the Spirit's power) for fruitful Christian work.

Our prayer is that over the years, this small course may be used by God to strengthen the biblical ministry of many churches in Scotland across the denominations; that it may prove to be the starting-point or launch-pad for many men and women to engage in serious, lifelong Bible teaching ministry.

When I was a parish vicar in England, I began to see how ordinary evangelical parish churches (as well as the famous 'flagship' evangelical churches) could be, and should be, producing a steady supply of committed young adults to be future leaders and Bible teachers. But they need training. The Cornhill Training Course may be one of the ways of meeting this need.

Please pray with us for God's blessing on this new work.

Bob: In Scotland we need to recapture the vision of Christ-honouring and life-changing preaching which takes the whole Bible seriously and applies it powerfully to our day. In Rutherford House we share the same goals and I look forward to working with Edward and others to help to realise these.

Working the Tables

Mike Parker, Edinburgh

'It is important to arrange a date with a minister before making other arrangements.'

From the Registrar General's advice to couples seeking marriage.

I love weddings. Really. I love funerals too, but that's another story (though with some similar emphases). It's not only the meeting, talking, arranging and preparation (and I heard your hollow laugh at the quote above). It's not only the service. It's the reception and the party afterwards. It's the doors that might be left open for the gospel that I love.

I guess I've already lost some of you. Weddings overwhelm you; it's all you can do to keep up with those arrangements and keep the peace with all the family complications. Or you just feel used by the whole process. And on top of all those funerals....

Too many of us are dealing with death all the time. It's time to seize the opportunities of life.

David Easton began this conversation at Crieff, Gordon Kennedy and Peter White continued it in the last edition. How do we respond to current challenges around marriage? How do we connect with contemporary culture? The stance I want to take is that of the principled, godly opportunist. It was Eugene Peterson who said that pastoral ministry is one of the few places left for genuine, God-given creativity to be expressed. In a climate of increasing distance between people and our churches and a considerable disconnect between our churches and our culture, I believe we should work with people

as much as possible at good times in their lives. Now is urgently the time to open doors again, doors of relationship that put us right back where the genius of pastoral ministry has always been. That way, we challenge them to think again about their spiritual assumptions and leave pathways open for them to investigate the gospel.

Back a bit

Let me explain by stepping back. A while ago, I had a question from a thoughtful lady in Oban. 'Why is there so little Christian stuff on TV these days?' It was a fair question.

We had a long conversation about Christian themes in the media. What's the longest piece of uninterrupted TV on commercial channels? Until very recently, the Sunday service. 'Panorama' and Radio 4 combine to focus on religion and fundamentalism in particular, grappling with the implications of 9/11 and 7/7 and the realities of our cultural commitment to pluralism. Radio Scotland's 'Morning Extra' and 'Scotland Live', Radio 4's 'Start the Week' and 'Beyond Belief' have plenty to say; you can join in and say your piece for the price of a phone call or an email. To say nothing of the Soaps and 'Big Brother' which sometimes find room for a clearly Christian character (think Cameron Stout) or at least a caricature (think Dot Cotton).

One way and another, there's a lot of 'Christian stuff' on the airwaves.

I think my questioner really meant, 'I miss "Late Call"'. Those of a certain age will remember: the end to ITV's evening, when ministers got to do a televisual thought for the day. A nod in the direction of a Christian framework and increasingly squeezed to the margins, in the end it perhaps gave rather more shape to Rev. I. M. Jolly than to contemporary culture. But it was a little corner, a programme where we Christians were completely in control and where uninterrupted proclamation was possible.

Now it's different. It's a pluralist world. Tolerance, we're told, is key. Actually, choice is our overwhelming value at the moment – in education, health care, politics, as well as in the mall and the high street. Nothing is accepted without question, and everyone has their questions. What we once assumed as known by all is no more; every generation has to learn for itself, to be persuaded afresh from scratch. Everyone has their own view and each has the right to be heard – hence the explosion of phone-ins and question programmes, and the attraction of polls and votes to see who's in (or, more likely, who's out).

In this context, introductory courses like 'Alpha' and 'Christianity Explored' score high. Our willingness

to move away from church premises to homes and offices signals a willingness to connect. But every church running such courses knows that sticky moment when there are no more guests coming. Then comes the really big challenge. Do we only have friends who are potentials for courses? Have we a platform on which to debate? Are we out there where the questions are? Have we anyone to talk to?

My point is this: conversations about spiritual issues *are* out there, but we Christians no longer control them. Indeed, we may not be in touch with them. Issues emerge suddenly over the water cooler or by the coffee machine, walking to the creche, and – yes – watching breaking news and current affairs programmes.

Issues also emerge in the midst of our celebrations and sadnesses. One of the immense privileges of pastoral ministry is our ticket to be with people at the best and worst times in their lives. And what better time than a wedding. This year's surveys show 89% of young Brits want to get married.¹ In the UK as a whole 7500 will opt for a civil wedding – yet around half of Scotland's annual 30,000 weddings still take place in churches. People have come to us at a good time. Can we celebrate with them?

John's Gospel captures it. No sooner has John the Baptist publicly identified Jesus as the Lamb of God, come to take away the sin of the world, than we meet him for ourselves. Where? At a public celebration, a wedding. He's travelled with his disciples and his Mum to be there, cheerfully mixing business with pleasure, work and family. He's present and clearly involved. Then trouble strikes. A Middle Eastern wedding can last as long as a week; it is the bridegroom's responsibility to provide the wine. Imagine the embarrassment when it runs out so soon. As Tom Wright puts it, 'Running out of wine was not just inconvenient, but a social disaster and disgrace. The family would have to live with the shame of it for a long time to come.'² Jesus

keeps his distance at first (John 2:4), but then quietly bails out this hapless bridegroom. And how he does! An enormous quantity of water becomes wine, pointing to the generosity of God's provision and the transformation of human life and experience. In Don Carson's words: 'The sheer quantity of water turned into wine then becomes symbolic of the lavish provision of the new age.'³ What wine it was – no supermarket plonk this, but the best till the last. And, as Robbie Coltrane once famously said, 'The wine was meant to be drunk.'⁴

The mark of hospitality in Middle Eastern culture is not how much is served, but how much is left over. An empty plate betrays a host who cannot provide. John 6:1-15 will show us again that Jesus satisfies human need in full and to spare: he takes five loaves and two fish to feed five thousand mouths and *all had enough to eat* (v. 12). What's more, nothing is wasted: twelve full baskets are collected for further use.

All this was done, John tells us, for the benefit of his disciples, who respond to this revelation of Jesus' glory by putting their faith in him (2:11). They wrote this story in order to persuade us also to believe.

As John's introduction parallels Genesis in its focus on the Word *in the beginning*, so Jesus' appearance at the wedding underlines God's provision for men and women outlined in Genesis 2. As the opening section of our wedding services remind us, it is not good that we should be alone, either in society in general or in personal

relationships. Marriage is precisely God's provision for us. It is the special case of human relationships, as complementary characters become companions and partners become parents, providing a secure and ordered context for children to grow.⁵

In case you've any doubt about this special relationship, marriage appears in Scripture and Jesus' teaching as one of the richest images of a full and final relationship enjoyed by God with his children, by Jesus and his church. It pictures how things will finally and fully be. Isaiah pointed to it (65: 17-66:24); Revelation anticipates and celebrates it. In Eugene Peterson's words, 'Heaven is a holy city living in harmony with God; heaven is a virgin bride, alive in intimacy with God; and the city and bride are us.'⁶ Marriage is thus a picture of a heaven in which there is 'a holiness that is neither cramped or distorted, but spacious; an illumination that goes beyond the minimum of showing what is true by showing it extravagantly beautiful'; and a wedding breakfast which represents 'a nourishment that is the healthy feeding of our lives, not the frivolous adornment of them.'⁷

All these themes are celebrated in Christian marriage. Should we not be fully involved then?

We know of course there is another side. Life's pretty complicated: there's a lot more water under the marriage bridge. On average in the 1950s men married at 25, women at 22; now it's 30 and 28 respectively. That means a lot of relationship ground has been covered before we meet them. 75% live together before marrying. The number of cohabiters is rising: 2 million in 2003 is estimated to rise to 3.8 million in 2031. Four out of ten children are born to unmarried parents. A quarter of children with married parents will see them divorce before they are 16. The average marriage lasts 11.5 years. 'With these statistics, why will your marriage be different?' is a question I often ask.

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I've found myself wondering many times – often in the midst of a wedding service – how hope triumphs over experience on such occasions. As I speak from Scripture about the ideals God's Word holds out before us, I'm acutely aware of the stories and statistics sitting before me. One in three marriages will, we're told, end in divorce; perhaps as many as one in two of new marriages. Time is no guarantee: one of the more shocking shifts is the number of long-standing marriages breaking up because it's just too much like hard work, or because a younger partner offers more spice and vigour. The virgin brides (and bridegrooms) of Revelation are rare indeed. Living together before marriage is almost universal, yet the figures warn of a special danger of separation soon after the big event.⁸ I often ask couples about the difference marriage made to them after they had lived together, perhaps seeking assurance that 'Trial marriage is more of a trial than a marriage' and that the biblical vision of a secure, public, long-standing, God-dependent relationship is actually better in every way. Christian writers like John Houghton even suggest that sex is better in this context. Hence our commitment to marriage preparation, which will need to address these issues.

It's in this kind of world that we are to be the church. Jesus prays for us in John 17: 'I'm calling you, and I'm sending you, that others may believe'. Evangelicals are often accused of having no clear ecclesiology: but Peter sets it out very clearly. We are church gathered and scattered, and God is responsible for both (1 Peter 1:1-2). We are special to God, scattered by God, and grace and peace from the Lord are given and known in the midst of this tension.

Working the tables

My predecessor at St Thomas's in Edinburgh was Dennis Lennon. His solid (Brethren background) ability to think theologically was complemented by his willingness to think sideways. His preaching was full of the Bible's

images and illustrations. You might not always follow on a Sunday, but his words would go off in your head on a Thursday when you'd suddenly see what he was talking about. He was a Scottish representative at the Lausanne Congress in the Philippines a few years back. Amongst the giants of the international evangelical scene, his favourite speaker was a layman from Hong Kong who spoke about the realities of mobilising churches for mission. The key issue, he said, is the difference between frogs and lizards. You can see how Dennis enjoyed the image – but here's the challenge. Most church leaders are frogs by nature; most congregation members are lizards. Frogs feed by waiting for food to come along; when it's near enough, out comes the tongue, and in goes the food. Lizards have to forage, to search, to hunt; they're out and about. Food doesn't come to them, they have to find it.

Eugene Peterson's sustained appeal to ministers is not to become professionalised. Instead he calls us to be 'Working the Angles'.⁹ His view is that we are called to focus on the pastoral priorities: prayer, Scripture and spiritual direction. In a one-way Powerpoint world, where multinational corporations – to say nothing of denominations – make your mind up for you, ministry is the place to be creative, to explore, to go with the wind of the Spirit, to fly by instinct, to see where and to whom God leads.

Ministry is the place to be creative, to explore, to go with the wind of the Spirit, to fly by instinct, to see where and to whom God leads.

When we take this approach, see how the opportunities flow:

- You'll discover how long it is since some of these guests entered a church. Notice how early they come to the service: not knowing what's expected, they huddle in nervous clusters up to an hour before the service begins. Make sure you go out of your way to greet and welcome them. Give simple and clear explanations during the service. Your service is their shop window. My prayer is always that they'll go away surprised and wanting more.
- As you welcome them and talk with the couple beforehand, see how many connections you can make. Who's here, where from, why? What are the links with this place, this church, these people? Not only does it humanise the process, it also gives you clues as to what to follow up on as you visit the close relatives in the coming weeks.
- Children are, as ever, a special case. Let those with young children know you'll not be phased if they have to get up and walk about. Show them where the toilets are. Better still, arrange a carpeted area for parents and children to play or read whilst the service progresses – ideally somewhere they can still see and be seen.
- Make a connection between the service and the reception. We can't say it all in the service. 'I've enjoyed getting to know these two; I'm looking forward to hearing more from you later.'
- You may find guests thank you for the service. If so, be brave: what was it you enjoyed most? What struck you? I ask the younger guests if this is the first church wedding or occasion they've been to, what they were expecting, what surprised them.
- If I possibly can, I take the opportunity to attend each part of the process: the service plus either the meal or the ceilidh that follows. The dynamics of each are different. A word of greeting or conversation at each reception table can go a very long way – if only to knock over the perception that min-

isters are distant and distracted. You won't need to stay too late: there does come a moment when thoughtful conversation loses out to loud music (and they all think you prepare 'your sermon' late on Saturday night anyway!).

I know what you're thinking. It's easy for an Episcopalian to think like this: not many weddings, plenty of time. In some measure that's true. But weddings do represent the challenge to us of finding ways of connecting afresh.

Does it have to be the minister who does all this? Absolutely not. It could and should be the ministry of the whole church. An early meeting with the minister could be followed by four or five sessions with trained group leaders for marriage preparation, using material such as that produced by CPAS, Care for the Family, and Alpha (based on Nikki & Sila Lee's *Marriage Book*). This is a great opportunity to build a group around those planning to be married over the same period, giving the church the chance to offer hospitality and deal with relationship realities. Why not offer preparation jointly? You may only have two couples, but town-wide or area-wide together we'd have a dozen.

I wish I'd paid more attention to marking anniversaries. I wish we'd held meals or evenings for those who hit significant stages, five or ten or twenty years. Again, the congregation can find real avenues of service here. And when so many contemporary Christians don't quite know where to start, you'll help them make connections again into the neighbourhood or the networks of people around.

If you can overcome the perceptual barrier and build a team, you could offer preparation, anniversary celebrations and marriage enrichment weekends. For 'project wedding' must now be followed by 'project lifelong marriage' – not just project house and holidays, project career, project family. Like involving others in regular services, it's hard at first – but pays enormous dividends in the long run.

It's also how the Lord intended church to be. Our neighbour still raves about the first-rate service she received from the local parish church when her Mum died. She was visited, listened to, the funeral planned with care and personal detail, the reception attended, and she was visited a fortnight later. Anniversaries have been noted. All without ever meeting the minister: this ministry is led by appointed elders from the congregation, commissioned and equipped for the task.

Tough calls and loose ends

David Easton's original presentation at Crieff recognised that we're increasingly meeting people who've lived scrambled lives. When they come to faith, there's much undoing to be done as well as a new life to be learned and lived. When they come to us to talk weddings, we see some of that complexity.

I've spent many hours trying to persuade cohabiting couples to marry sooner rather than later and thus recognise the reality of their committed relationship. Episcopal churches offer a service of blessing or thanksgiving after civil marriage which is especially helpful if divorce is involved. I wonder if our lives wouldn't be better if the state decided that all weddings had to be civil, with the option of a church celebration to follow. Finding a hotel and meeting the cost is usually the issue, along with a

vision of how things ought to be. My instinct is not to penalise couples for this, but to find a way of celebrating with them when the time comes.

What about 'off-site' weddings? I always aim for a service in church, with celebrations continuing elsewhere. It's not easy to achieve, as we're often the last piece of the jigsaw. Yet we could start a counter trend. Over the last three years travelling I've seen some beautiful church re-builds. Some of them mean you could have the wedding and the party all in one place. I know alcohol is the stumbling block for many of our churches; some who have grasped this nettle have found to their relief their hospitality has not been abused. We could offer genuine and joyful celebrations, especially for those for whom an average cost of £17,370 (*average!*) is simply beyond them – or will take them three more years to save for, or will put them in (more) debt. In some of our congregations there are friends who run catering businesses; in others, it would be a very fruitful link with local businesses. After all, Jesus ran his own business (perhaps a design and build partnership, in contemporary terms), and spoke a great deal about investing wisely in relationships for the sake of the Kingdom.

With Saturdays taken for years to come, what about Friday or even Sunday as a day to marry? I took a wedding once on Easter Sunday morning. The bride had fallen out with her family; we were her family. It was a remarkable and memorable morning and, happily, she has since been reconciled.

What this amounts to is showing an interest, taking an initiative, meeting people on their ground, leaving a door open. In so doing, you'll be pointing them to the Lord who came onto our turf, into our world. It's a principled, godly, opportunist approach. These people are here and have made contact with us. Despite the nerves and the tensions, it's basically a good day. With the Lord's help, and with the ministry of musicians, stewards,

What this amounts to is showing an interest, taking an initiative, meeting people on their ground, leaving a door open.

caretakers and cleaners beforehand, we want them to remember it. We want them above all to be caught by surprise: the best weddings are when the guests say 'I never knew church was like that.' The implication is, they might just be prepared to look again at what we believe, and at the Jesus who first appeared at a wedding.

Mike Parker is General Secretary of Evangelical Alliance in Scotland. He is shortly moving to work with MECO (Middle East Christian Outreach), a mission agency working with churches in Muslim countries.

Endnotes

¹ Current statistics from *The Sunday Times Magazine*, February 12, 2006.

² Tom Wright, *John for Everyone*, Volume I, page 22; SPCK, London, 2002.

³ Don Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, page 174; IVP, Leicester, 1991.

⁴ Robbie Coltrane, the Scottish actor and comedian, once did a late-night series of monologues from the Gospels. I remember them from the late 1980s or early 90s but have been unable to trace the videos.

⁵ 'Complementary' doesn't just mean extroverts and introverts. 'In 1995 the University of Berne asked a group of women to smell unwashed T-shirts worn by different men and declare a preference. It was found that the women consistently chose the smell of men who had different immune systems from their own – so that, combined, they could produce healthy offspring.' (*The Sunday Times Magazine*, 12/2/06).

⁶ Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*, page 175; Harper Collins, New York, 1988.

⁷ *ibid.*, page 183.

⁸ This is well known and documented, but I cannot trace the specific statistical source for it.

⁹ Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1987 and *The Gift*, Marshall Pickering, London, 1995. Peterson's appeal is echoed by John Piper in *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*, Broadman & Holman, Tennessee, 2002.

Book Reviews

The Message of the Trinity

Brian Edgar

IVP, Leicester, 2004. 336 pp. £9.99

ISBN 1 84474 048 X

The Message of the Trinity comes within 'The Bible Speaks Today' series of Bible Themes. This is biblical theology at its best. There are no tiresome attempts to try and explain the Trinity with water, steam and ice. Instead, Scripture passages which reveal that God is Trinity are examined and expounded. As a result, the doctrinal issues discussed range much wider and further than would be found in most systematic, historic or philosophical considerations of the Trinity.

Edgar begins by suggesting (I think correctly) that the best-known verse in the Bible is not John 3:16 but 2 Cor.13:14 i.e. 'May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit with you all.' His point is to show how deep the concept of the Trinity runs in our veins, even subconsciously.

He then considers three Old Testament texts (Deut. 6:4-9 'The Lord our God is one', Prov. 8:22-31 'The wisdom of God'; and Ezek. 37:1-14 'The Spirit of God' and shows how all three persons of the Trinity are active without necessarily being specified.

Next, Edgar considers the Trinity in the life of our Lord Jesus, at his incarnation and baptism, through his mission, teaching and finally his resurrection.

In the final section Edgar examines the experience of the Trinity in the early church, both in Acts and in the Epistles.

We don't go to the books and commentaries in the BST series looking for innovation or ground-breaking revelation. We go seeking sound, solid and reliable evangelical scholarship. This book is no exception. Edgar simply articulates what we believe already – and he does it very well. The usual study guide is included.

Ian Watson, Kirkmuirhill

The Cross from a Distance - Atone- ment in Mark's Gospel

Peter G. Bolt

IVP, Illinois/Leicester, 2004. 213 pp.
£12.99

UK ISBN I 84474 049 8

US ISBN 0 8308 2619 X

This is an interesting look at the cross in Mark's Gospel. Bolt begins by looking at the early chapters under the heading, 'The cross and the abolition of religion'. His argument is that in the early conflict stories between Jesus and the authorities we discover that religious ceremony and practice is not the way to God. As Mark unfolds his story we find that Jesus comes to unfold a new way – by grace and faith in him.

Bolt then moves on to reflect on the three central predictions of the death of Christ found in Mark 8,9 and 10.

There then comes a section which will possibly jar with many readers where Bolt argues that the apocalyptic passages in Mark 13 refer not to the end of the age but rather to the various events that will unfold in the passion narrative itself. In a footnote he notes that he has expanded this view elsewhere and that it has been described as 'a brave one, but rather forced' (p.102). This is a significant part of this work but this reviewer is left unconvinced of Bolt's argument.

Bolt then has sections dealing with the passion story itself and a final one which takes us on to the resurrection and its significance.

This is a useful book, bringing fresh insight to Mark's account of the Gospel. The lengthy section relating to Mark 13, while challenging, remains somewhat elusive. Bolt several times refers us to other works where he has expanded his argument but without these it is difficult to fully appreciate his position. Nevertheless, as the series editor D. A. Carson comments, 'The result is a book that will stimulate and edify any serious Christian reader' (p.8).

John Sharp, East Kilbride

Let's Study I Peter

William W. Harrell

Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 2004.

175pp. £5.95

ISBN 0 85151 868 0

Over the last month, William Harrell's exposition of I Peter has been my quiet time companion as I have reread Peter's letter. The 'Let's Study' series purports to be 'an aid for individual Bible study' and so what better way to put it to the test?

The text is divided in such a way as to provide the reader with a month's worth of material. This is very helpful. Small, manageable portions of Scripture with Harrell's comments are easily incorporated into a quiet time. Harrell's exposition is succinct and clear. His strength is most definitely in the 'there and then' of the text with a good understanding of the situation of the original recipients of Peter's letter. He certainly opens up their world to the reader. The themes of suffering, salvation and purity are ably addressed.

The weakness of this book is that the exposition at times seems distant from the 21st century. In many cases I found myself waiting for the text to be applied to daily life and surprised that it did not always happen. This was disappointing, especially as the self-confessed aim of the book is to 'explain and apply the message of Scripture' (p. ix) and the themes so pertinent to life today.

This lack of down-to-earth application is to some extent remedied by the questions at the end of the book in the Group Study Guide. There we find thought-provoking questions which link the message of the text with our own lives – but I do think that there is space for some of this to take place within the body of text itself.

Reflecting on the helpfulness of this book, I would suggest that its primary usefulness would be for those who are preparing group Bible studies on 1 Peter or perhaps even for a home group wishing to study a book of the Bible. The exposition would give a solid foundation from which to shape a study and

Book Reviews

the questions at the end would be a very helpful stimulus to further discussion.

Jane Howitt, Riga, Latvia

A Pocket Guide to the Bible

Kevin O'Donnell

Lion Hudson plc, Oxford, 2004.

254pp. £6.99

ISBN 0 7459 5131 7

A Pocket Guide to the Bible is an ideal resource for anyone looking to dip into the Bible and glean an understanding of the context and style of each of its books. It is informative without being 'bookish' and would suit equally a person looking into the Bible for the first time, those wanting help for Bible study groups or those already familiar with the Bible who seek a deeper understanding but who have not the time to explore the larger commentaries.

Set out as a book-by-book guide, it simply presents the outline and themes of each book including the Apocrypha. There is also an interesting appendix, which gives particular attention to miracles in the Bible, where a variety of Christian viewpoints is presented.

There is a quick read suggested list for each book or set of books to help the reader get the 'big picture'. An interesting feature is the section headed 'Jesus in...' for each book of both the Old and New Testaments looking at both the ancient prophecies in the Old and their fulfilment in the New Testament. This Pocket Guide to the Bible presents Jesus as central to the entire Bible and ties together the threads for those who are just beginning to read it for themselves.

Whether you require a small volume as a companion on your travels or if time does not permit you the luxury of reading the meatier commentaries, this book is ideal in size and content. It would be equally suitable as a gift for a new believer or someone about to embark on their first serious Bible study.

Sharon Taylor, Livingston

Book Reviews

Sexuality and Salvation

Steve Mallon

Scottish Christian Press, Edinburgh,
2004. 114 pp. £8.99
ISBN 190432505X

This book is the result of a Masters Degree dissertation by Steve Mallon, of the Church of Scotland's Mission and Discipleship Council. The aim of his dissertation was "proving" that the church is a hard place to be if you are young and gay' (p. 42). Of course, Steve was able to prove this very thing. There is no doubt that the book highlights huge failure by the church in Scotland. It is a great pity that it also contains many instances of absolute nonsense which threaten to overshadow and obscure any truth contained. Most of us take our heterosexuality for granted. It's not something we've ever had to explain to anyone. For those physically attracted to the same sex, however, there is no such luxury. They have to choose either to hide these feelings, or to be open about them. If they choose the former, they face a lifetime of physical loneliness, and if the latter, they need to explain themselves or 'come out', sometimes several times a day. Both of these choices cost – there is no easy option – and both deserve our sympathy and understanding. Many evangelicals have offered neither and indeed have been so openly hostile that these people haven't dared come near us. We have 'cast the first stone' all too quickly without taking time to offer the love that God offers us while we are yet sinners. Steve Mallon accuses us of 'withdrawing grace' from them. Isn't he right? Steve Mallon's idea of 'acceptance', however, is that we should 'assist [our young people] become what they would like to become' (p. 17). He asserts that the church is there 'for our needs', he puts freedom of choice on a pedestal and he suggests that the church should celebrate sex, even outwith marriage (p. 37). He describes Jesus as the 'eternal contemporary'

(p89) and cites Acts 10:9 as relevant. Indeed, Scripture is used either badly or not at all. As he sets out the scope of his research (p. 44), a look at what Scripture says does not feature. The 'biblical' picture of marriage described on p. 70 is poor, with no Scripture quoted. The chapter study guide, a potentially extremely useful resource, has no biblical references, and is characterised by leading questions which assume many of Mallon's statements to be correct. The word 'salvation' is never used in the scriptural sense and although he does say that the church should be trying to restore the moral and ethical dimensions to sexuality, at no point does he look at what these are. So there is much here to irritate, much to make you dismiss this book completely. To do so, however, risks ignoring very real challenges. How do we acknowledge the desperate struggles some of our young people will be facing? How do we minister to people who are gay?

Gordon Palmer, East Kilbride

Before God

George W. Stroup

Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co,
Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2004. 201
pp. £12.99 pbk.
ISBN 0-8028-2214-2

Before God refers to life lived before the face of God. The book argues that we live in a time, when many people, including Christians in pews and professional theologians, no longer understand their lives as lived before God. That has serious consequences for how Christians experience and understand such basic realities as sin, God's grace in Jesus Christ and gratitude for God's grace as the basis for worship, the Christian life and the service of God in the world. The author, who teaches at Columbia Seminary in Georgia, USA, explores what it means to live 'before God' and what happens when Christian life becomes indistinguishable from other forms of life in our post-Christian society. From the New Testament, he recognises Jesus Christ as the one person

who lives fully and authentically before God and before neighbour, and in whom we can find true humanity. Today, sin is no longer recognised as a turning away from God and a refusal to love God as God should be loved. Because sin is 'before God', forgiveness of sin is only something that God can provide. A chapter argues that Christian life should be seen as an expression of gratitude to God rather than entitlement to grace. Finally, the Holocaust and mass suffering (cf. 2005's natural disasters) are considered through the experience of Psalmists and of Jesus. Stroup asks whether life before God requires an awareness of God's presence, and if not, how Christians should live their lives in the shadows of the eclipse of life before God.

The chapters on Sin, Grace and Gratitude were originally given as lectures to Presbyterian Churches. This densely packed book weaves seamlessly between biblical exposition, systematic analysis of Reformation and twentieth-century theologians, and incisive comment on contemporary secular society and church life.

As a parish minister, I found this book important, helpful and challenging, well worth getting stuck into, one I intend to dip into often – and re-read.

Iain C. Murdoch, Wishaw

Incarnation

Alister McGrath

SPCK, London, 2005. 87 pp. £10.99
ISBN 0 281 05593 9

This is the second volume in the 'Truth and the Christian Imagination' series. Creation is written, Redemption, Resurrection, Heaven and God are planned. These address some of the key concepts of Christian faith in a way which will engage both mind and imagination.

Incarnation is an attractive book. It feels more like a gift book with its hard cover, its quality paper and colour photographs. It has seven short chapters. Each chapter includes a fine art painting which helps to explore the subject matter. These are well chosen

and evocative. I found the comments on aspects of each painting helpful. Both my mind and imagination were engaged. I found myself appreciating facets of the biblical story they depicted in a fresh way. For example, in chapter 6, 'The way, the truth and the life', McGrath uses The Raising of Lazarus by Maurice Denis, and comments, 'Denis brilliantly depicts the confluence of word and event: the fact that Jesus is the resurrection and the life leads to the bestowal of that resurrection and life' (p. 67).

In fact, I was regularly brought up short. In every chapter there was a fresh insight or a telling phrase. Alister McGrath, Professor of Historical Theology at Oxford, both knows his subject very well and is a first-class communicator. Everyone reading this book will find some stimulus to think, pray or imagine. Yet that's potentially its weakness too. It's not a gift book, nor a devotional book, nor a doctrinal exploration nor a scholarly work, so what is it? I fear that being jack of all trades it will turn out to be master of none, which would be a real shame.

Neil Dougall, North Berwick

Paul and First Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection

E. Randolph Richards

IVP, Downers Grove/Leicester, 2004.

252 pp, £12.99

ISBN 0 8308 2788 9

I sit typing this at the keyboard of a PC and, when it's complete, will email it to someone who will edit and typeset it for you to read in this journal. For good or ill, I thought up and 'wrote' the words for this review all by myself in a study. Paul's experience of writing was very different, technologically and authorially. Randolph Richards' book gives us a fascinating insight into the world of first century letter writing that shatters our twenty-first century misconceptions of what it must have been like for Paul the author. He takes us through the process of letter writing from beginning (writing materials)

to the end (the letter carrier's delivery to the recipients) in a readable and informative way with references to primary and secondary literature for those who want to take things further.

It is, perhaps, the middle section of the book that has greatest implications for understanding the production of Paul's letters – the chapters on secretaries and the creation/insertion of content. In contrast to our world of individual authors, we are introduced to collegial writing, pre-formed material and the role of the secretary. How are we to understand the role of Tertius in relation to Romans, or Sosthenes in relation to 1 Corinthians? There is a spectrum of possibility from scribe to co-author and it is difficult to identify the point on the spectrum for any one letter. The role can vary even within a letter. However, the primary sender is always the one who carries responsibility for what is written.

In our day of cheap communication, Richards' estimation of the cost of producing Paul's letters is indicative of their importance to his mission. He (conservatively) estimates that Romans would have cost Paul (or his patron) over \$2,000 and even Philemon would have cost over \$100 (not including postage!). Paul didn't 'write' letters simply to pass the time of day in prison. They were a necessary and expensive part of his task of spreading the Good News of Jesus and of shaping the communities of believers according to that gospel. Richards' book gives us some real insight as to how Paul undertook this task.

Jared Hay, Balerno

Teaching The Christian Hope

David Jackman

Proclamation Trust Media / Christian Focus Publications, 2004. 133 pp.

£6.99

ISBN 1-85792-518-1

This book is part of a series 'principally aimed at preachers who are preparing expository sermons' [preface, p. 8]. Other books in the series have dealt with individual Bible books, but this

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one takes a topical approach, the topic being biblical eschatology. It lends itself to being the basis for a series of six sermons on the Christian Hope, one sermon for each of the book's six chapters. They are entitled 'Hope for a hopeless world'; 'The coming of the Lord'; 'Personal eschatology'; 'The way the world ends'; 'The shape of things to come'; 'What sort of people?'

Rather than deal with each of the subjects exhaustively, Jackman focuses on two or three appropriate passages of Scripture for each chapter. This ties in with his aim of encouraging expository sermons, not systematic theology lectures.

I thought that the best way to review this book would be to 'road-test' it. So the sermons have been preached! Each chapter of *Teaching the Christian Hope* has more than enough material for a sermon. What I did for each sermon was to choose just one of the passages that Jackman majored on, using his headings and outlines as the basis for my own exposition. I denied myself the use of other commentaries, and found that a hard-pressed preacher *could* get by quite well on this book alone. It is not a set of ready-made, off-the-peg sermons, ready to preach. But it does much of the spade work for the preacher in that it gathers together just about all the material he will need, and arranges and explains it helpfully, with quotations, illustrations and application. Heartily recommended.

Tom McWhirter, Glenluce

Quiet Moments

Tom Wright

Lion Publishing, Oxford, 2003. £4.99

ISBN 0 745946739

This small hardback book, measuring only five inches by five inches, offers a series of meditations for those who have taken time to stop from the busyness of everyday life. The thoughts are grouped in different sections such as 'Silence is...'; 'Confession' and 'Stillness in busy lives'. Each section flows effort-

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lessly into the other, and is given no introduction. Illustrations in the book focus on shades of blue and green and tend to have sea and nature themes.

Tom Wright believes everyone needs moments of quiet – the chance to stop, to think, to listen and to be refreshed. In this sense his book aims to be a contemplative and reflective read. It is a book to be dipped in and out of and digested, rather than one to be consumed all at one sitting. *Quiet Moments* is not a difficult read and easily accessible to most people in the congregation. It would serve well as a coffee table book – one to be lifted and flicked through.

On a personal note this was a book that I enjoyed flicking through – it was an attractive book to hold and its meditations were at times penetrating and very thought-provoking. It would be a book that I would consider giving as a present and I am sure it would be appreciated by most people!

Bella Agnew, Bangor, Co. Down

Pastoral Visitation A Pocket Manual

David Short and David Searle
Christian Focus / Rutherford House,
Fearn/Edinburgh, 2004. 142 pp.,
hardback £8.99 (£6 if 10 copies
ordered)

ISBN 1-84550-016-4

Here is a pocket-sized book of Scripture verses, hymns, songs and prayers on a variety of themes appropriate for use by a person on a pastoral visit. Themes such as hospital admission, recovery from illness, facing death, anxiety for the future, fear of losing independence, need for guidance, why has God allowed this, lack of assurance, loss of faith, carers, satanic oppression, for example. It is a very useful resource. Churches might like to buy a bulk order, for example, and give one to new deacons on appointment to office. However, anyone engaged in pastoral visitation could profit from this small book.

*Brian Talbot, Carbrain Baptist Church,
Cumbernauld*

Inside Stories. Tales of Change and Growth

Compiled by Jean Watson
Lion Publishing, Oxford, 2003. £8.99
ISBN 0745948162

This small hardback book, only 128 pages in length, has as its focus themes of transition and identity. The book is collated in topics – for example, 'View-points'; 'Identity'; 'Journeys'; and 'Relationships'. All these themed sections flow effortlessly into one another. Jean Watson intersperses extracts of stories with poetry and prose to illustrate these themes. Each insert, in the main, lasts no more than a page. The writers vary from the very well-known, like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, to those with a less familiar profile.

Watson sees her book as an attempt to challenge our patterns of life and our preconceptions, and makes space for us to think anew about who we are and how we live. In this sense it is contemplative and reflective. It is perhaps best suited to those who enjoy poetry, who like to dip in and out of books and slowly to take time to digest what they have read.

It is not a difficult read and easily accessible to most people in the congregation. It could also be viewed as a coffee table book – one to be lifted and flicked through.

On a personal note this was not a book I overly enjoyed – which was no reflection on the book itself! I, by nature, do not overly appreciate poetry and, being a practical hands-on person, find quiet, contemplative, reflective writings hard to appreciate. In spite of this there were stories within this book which left their mark with me, like 'Making Good' by Johann Christoph Arnold, and these made the read worthwhile.

Bella Agnew, Bangor, Co. Down

Four Gospels, One Jesus? A symbolic reading

Richard A. Burrige
SPCK, London, 2005. xvi 199 pp.
£9.99

The first edition sold over 12,000 copies, and was written for theological students and thinking Christian believers. For this edition he notes developments in New Testament scholarship over the last decade, adds a link with Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, and a brief comment on the *Revised Common Lectionary*. Richard Burrige is Dean of King's College, London.

The book begins and ends with contrasting portraits of Churchill. From this starting point, Burrige introduces the various forms of New Testament criticism. There is a chapter on each Gospel, recording characteristic motifs in the portraits of Jesus. According to the final chapter the Gospels set limits to our understanding of Jesus, like the boundaries of a ball park, keeping our appreciation of Jesus on the pitch!

The four Gospels 'confront us with one Jesus – with the understanding that what Jesus is, God is. In each case, the response sought from the reader is the same – faith, which leads to worship: "my Lord and my God!" (JR 20.28)' (p. 181).

Burrige himself worships Jesus, he prays, preaches and teaches. His personal commitment to Christ pervades his writing. There is warmth and kindness, as well as fruit from several decades of research on the Gospels.

The main weakness of the book is his use of the traditional association between the Gospel writers and the faces of the cherubim from Ezekiel 1:10. He links Matthew to the human face, Mark to the lion, Luke to the ox, and John to the eagle.

There are excellent comments on the detail. But, for example, in the chapter on Mark the lion is John (p. 36), Jesus (p. 36), and even Mark himself (p. 64). The lion (Jesus) 'bounds off into his work' (p. 37), 'rushes around just like a bounding lion' (p. 37),

'bounds onto the stage like a lion' (p. 44), roars at his disciples and rushes on ahead of them (p. 48 – and again on p. 49). The lion 'promises to meet us in Galilee where he first called and chose us to be his pride –and joy?' (p. 49). Intriguing to some readers, irritating to others.

Jonathan Jukes, Kirk Ella

Voicing God's Psalms

Calvin Seerveld
William B. Eerdmans Publishing
Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan,
Cambridge, U.K.,
2005, xxiv + 164 pp. Audio CD
included. £11.99 n/p
ISBN 0-8028-2806-X

This is a volume in 'The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies' series; at present there are seven other published volumes. 'This book and CD together aim to help anyone who picks them up to start reading and listening to God talking live' (xvii). Seerveld offers new translations from the Hebrew and Greek of 37 of the biblical 150 psalms, six other Old Testament passages, four New Testament passages and two congregational paeans. Seerveld arranges his material in an individualistic nine-fold form critical division. In the light of recent developments in Psalm Studies towards reading the Psalter as a purposefully edited collection, not to recognise such work gives this book a slightly out-of-date feel. The presence of an audio CD strongly suggests the importance of hearing the text being read. I think Seerveld is trying to suggest something more than it is good to hear the text read out loud. There is an emphasis on hearing and listening in the book which suggests a loosely defined hermeneutic of vocalisation of the text. While parallelism, the dominant feature of Hebrew poetry, may be 'translated into other languages, without destroying its essence' (S. E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible*, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 73) even if there were some hermeneutical key in hearing or

listening, the Hebrew language cannot be translated without destroying, or significantly changing, its essence in a way that leaves hearing a translation to be a different experience from hearing the original. At a time when there are many fresh and helpful contributions to the field of Psalm Studies Seerveld's book will not find a place among them.

Gordon Kennedy, Stranraer

The God of Covenant

Edited by Jamie A. Grant and Alistair I. Wilson
Apollos, IVP, Leicester, 2005. 256 pp.
£14.99
ISBN 1 84474 065 X

This book is a series of papers given to evangelical students at a conference of the Tyndale Fellowship. In other words, this is not a 'Dummy's Guide to Covenant'. The nine contributors from different disciplines take us from the Old Testament origins of the covenant, through to some practical implications of the covenant for us today. At the heart of 'covenant' is a relationship (Lev. 26:12: 'I will be your God and you shall be my people'). The covenant of God is spelled out, crucially, with Abraham. This covenant is confirmed at various times in Old Testament history, but, because of Israel's apparent inability to keep their covenant vows for any length of time, Jeremiah 31:31-34 speaks of a new, spiritual and eternal covenant. God's covenant was always meant to have the effect of drawing the nations to him. The covenant is also a springboard for our praise and the motivation for our lives of mercy and justice; it speaks of the forgiveness of sins and it finds its spiritual expression at the Lord's Table. It is argued that it might be helpful to think of 'headship theology', where the 'New Covenant' becomes the 'Messianic Administration'. One chapter gives a philosophical basis for understanding God's 'fairness' in choosing a people for himself. The final chapter on the role of the land of Israel is very thought-provoking. Indeed, any one of the chapters is likely to whet the appe-

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tite for further reading. Each chapter is well researched and presented and will repay careful study. I found the book an excellent guide to the many facets of this vital subject of 'covenant' and am convinced that most readers will find new and helpful insights here.

Hugh Watt, Drumnadrochit

The Search for Forgiveness

Chawkat Moucarray
Inter Varsity Press, 2004. 373 pp.
£12.99
ISBN 1-84474-018-8

This is a unique and compelling book. With the primary topic of divine forgiveness there is a challenging survey of the motives and dimensions of pardon and punishment, of the answers that Islam gives to these questions, and the Christian perspectives from the Bible on God's sovereignty, justice and mercy.

In his carefully researched study of Islam the author gives us an overview of the various strands of Islamic thought, providing helpful explanations of the views of Sunni, Shi'ite and Sufism on God's attributes, forgiveness in theology, in mysticism, and daily life and ethics, alongside Christian truth in each of these areas. A feature of the book is the many summary tables providing the differing views of Islamic schools on key issues. The indexes of Qur'anic and biblical references and the various appendixes are most helpful, including the short biographical notes on Muslim theologians and mystics.

Chawkat Moucarray, who grew up in an Arab Christian home in Syria and now is a lecturer at All Nations Christian College, is concerned to help Christians to gain new insights into Islam and to learn how to present the gospel in terms familiar to Muslims. He hopes that Muslim readers will also gain an understanding of the message of the gospel.

The book is an essential reference for those engaging in relationship with Muslim friends and neighbours. But even if readers cannot make full use

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of the scope of this challenging book, everyone would be compelled by the clear demonstration of God's motives in forgiving. At least one should read and re-read the final chapter on the primary motive of love, to give us a hunger for pursuing the search for the reality of forgiveness.

Brian S. Ringrose, Edinburgh

The Expansion of Christianity

Timothy Yates

Lion Publishing, Oxford, 2004. 190

pp. £8.99

ISBN 0745951082

The Expansion of Christianity is one of the Lion Histories series. It touches on an area of considerable need for many in telling the story of 'how Christianity developed from its beginnings as a persecuted sect in an outpost of the Roman Empire to become the largest religion on earth'.

There are different ways of doing this: for example by chronology or by geography. Yates tells this story by focussing on developments by continent within given timeframes. Within this he describes the events with a particular interest in the pioneering individuals. The twentieth century presents him with a dilemma as Christianity is not easily divided into geographical zones as it becomes a truly world religion; his description of the century as 'An African Century' is not wholly convincing though his description of the African Independent Churches is interesting. To deal with the phenomenon of Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement worldwide in two pages is a remarkable achievement.

The inevitable brevity noted above is an obvious weakness but this is only meant to be an introduction. This book is a helpful introduction, though a fuller booklist and index would have helped point the reader to possibilities of further study. It is accessible and attractively laid out with pictures, biographical sections and quotations. The author intentionally takes a wide

view of Christianity including practically everything that claims that title. Within the limitations of space the author tries to draw out evaluation of strengths and weaknesses.

I enjoyed reading this book. Despite limitations, it fulfils a useful function and whets the appetite for more even though it does require some discernment.

Andy Lines, New Malden

War and Grace

Don Stephens

Evangelical Press, Darlington, 2005.

272 pp. £8.95

ISBN 0 85234 594 1

What have a Japanese fighter pilot, a German judge, a British civil servant and a Jewish nursery worker in common? This book describes how, through the horrors and privations of war, God was at work in each of these people's lives, transforming and preparing them for his service. Thirteen stories are told, each totally different from the others, but all of them revealing how God can do beautiful things in evil times. This is not a book which glorifies or justifies war; nor is it one which dwells on heroism in battle. Rather is it a book which shows the infinitely varied ways in which God can work in the midst of conflict to draw men and women to himself. Of particular poignancy are the two stories set side by side of Mitsuo Fuchida, the Japanese pilot who led the assault on Pearl Harbour, and Jacob DeShazer, the American pilot who took part in the revenge attack the following year and who was subsequently held in a Japanese prison camp. It was DeShazer's tract, read by Fuchida after the war, which was instrumental in his conversion. The stories of 'behind the scenes' people are no less fascinating, especially the one about the man who inspired Ian Fleming's 'Q' in his James Bond novels. All of these people demonstrate an unshakeable belief in God's call to serve him, whether on the home front or in battle and each experiences God's power to change lives.

From the prisoner of war who forgave his bullying captor to the captain of a crippled submarine who prayed for divine deliverance, from the German pastor martyred for his faith to the orphaned Jewish girl who survived the holocaust to become a Christian – all of these stories remind us that God calls us from every tribe and nation and his purposes supersede all national boundaries and man's inhumanity to man. This is a book to inspire and challenge – an 'unputdownable' read!

Sheila Steele, Bangor, Co. Down
